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Thesis

OUR NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

by

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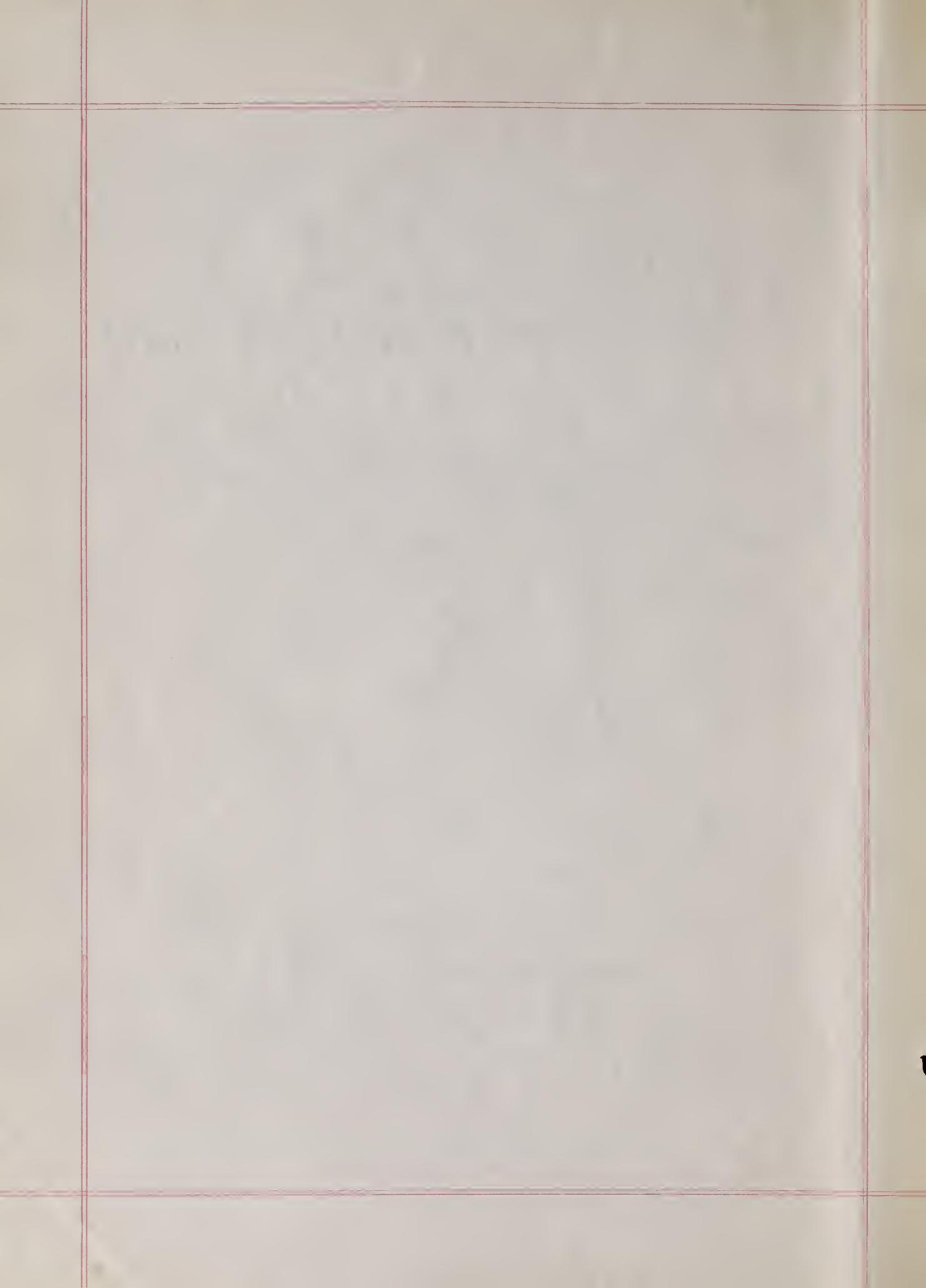
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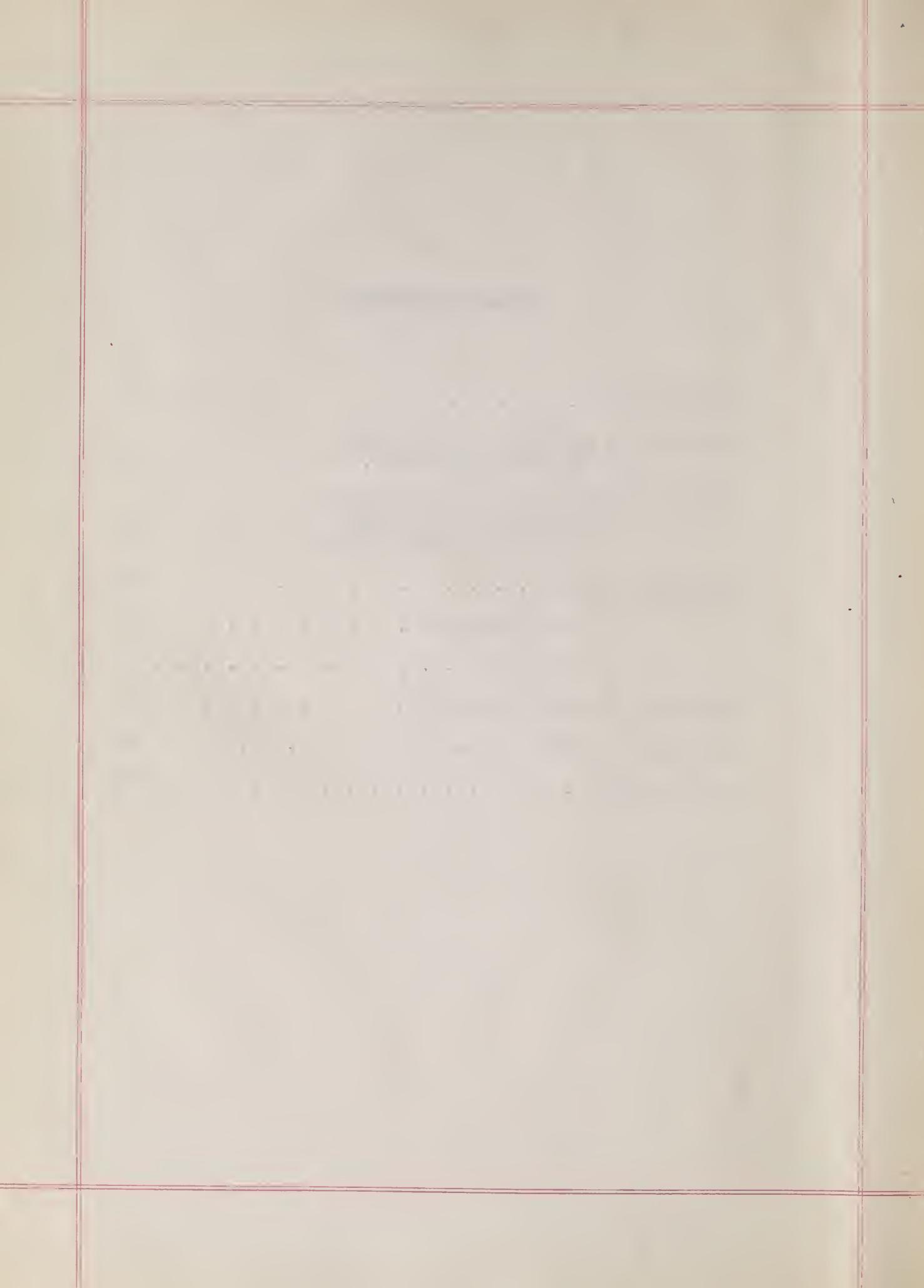
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## OUR NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

### INTRODUCTION

In March of 1935, Congress voted an appropriation of \$50,000 for carrying out the provisions of the Act of June 19, 1934, establishing our National Archives.<sup>1</sup> This appropriation brings to fulfillment the efforts of half a century and more to awaken a national consciousness of the importance of our official records, to secure legislation for their transfer and control, to provide a building suitably constructed for their housing, and to obtain funds for carrying out the tremendous task of properly arranging the archives themselves. More than once since 1878 when the first legislation for archives was instituted, the realization of the ideal has been so nearly attained as to permit plans for construction of a building to be submitted and approved, and even to allow for the purchase of locations in Washington, D.C., to be used for the erection of such a Hall of Records.<sup>2</sup> Though urged by successive presidents, Congress failed each time to appropriate funds for

<sup>1</sup> Digest of Appropriations for 1935, p.111.  
U.S. Govt., 2d. Vol., VIII, p.1, 1932.



carrying out an archives procedure, thereby rendering useless the mere possession of a site for such a building. Not the least of the several essentials to a successful archives establishment is the assurance that the government will furnish the necessary funds for its operation. With the attainment of this last objective, we have completed the requirements of an archival establishment, in that, by the Public Buildings Act of 1926, we have erected an archives depot of which we may be justly proud; by the Act establishing the National Archives, we have provided for an archival administration; and finally, we have secured the funds to admit of immediate procedure.

In writing of archives, it is the common practice to define the term. But the character of archives is so well understood at the present time that such definition seems superfluous. Differentiation between archives and historical documents, however, or between federal and state archives, may permit of some consideration. Historical documents, including both the manuscript and the printed documents, may be any documents which contribute to a study of the past, and in this sense, archives are historical documents. Archives possess a more exact interpretation: their qualifications demand that they originate in some department of the government. This eliminates at once, as archives in this country, all historical documents antedating the founding of the Constitution of the United States and of the various

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state constitutions. Pre-Revolutionary "archives" are, correctly speaking, historical documents rather than archives. The fact that the National Archives establishment will take over the custody only of the federal archives will perhaps aid in an elucidation of this point.

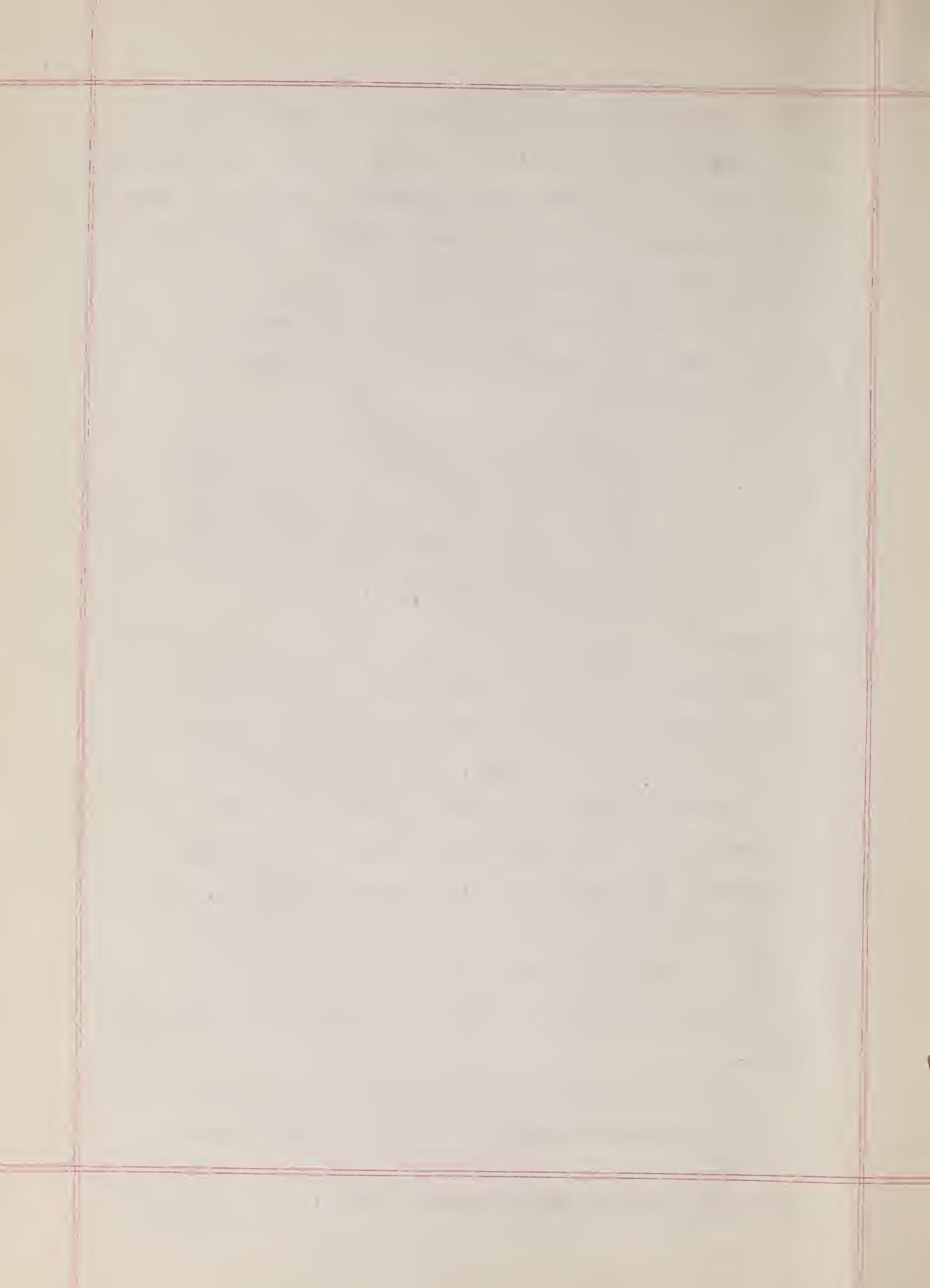
State archives are similar to the federal, but they differ in their origin and in the control of them. They have been described as:

"journals and proceedings of legislative assemblies, all papers known in general as public documents, reports of State officials, reports of legislative committees, reports of State commissions, statutes or session laws, and occasional publications such as census reports, topographical surveys etc., published by State authority."<sup>1</sup>

These archives are authorized by the states and they perform their functions. Control of them rests with the states, in accordance with an American principle which the National Archives has no wish to violate. Finding their origin in state authority, these archives differ as much from each other as from the federal archives, because of the differences in organization of the state governments. This absence of uniformity in the creation of state archives is marked, a fact which demonstrates the superiority of foreign centralized authority in this phase of governmental activity.

The line of distinction between the papers of the National Archives and historical documents, or between

<sup>1</sup> American Historical Association. Report. 1900. Vol. II, p.11.



the papers of the National Archives and the State Archives to clear. The National Archives will have no interest in the one and will attempt no control of the latter. There remains to make clear the relation of State Archives to historical documents.

The close relation of these two classes is based on the material presence of historical documents in archives depositaries, particularly in those states formed from the original colonies. In the ideal situation all such papers would be separated from those created by State Departments and would be cared for by State libraries, historical societies and commissions. In Massachusetts, for example, this would mean that the records of the General Court previous to the date of the adoption of our State Constitution would be removed from their present place in the so-called State Archives. Such a sweeping reform would be difficult, though it is not impossible to visualize a great stimulus of interest resulting from the attainment of the national ideal.



LEGISLATIVE REPORTS TO OBTAIN  
AN ARCHIVES BUILDING,  
1810-1913

Congress gave evidence very early in the history of the United States, of an interest in preserving the records of the nation. In 1810, Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts was chairman of a committee to investigate "the ancient records and archives of the United States..." He reported that the committee "find all the public records and papers, belonging to the period antecedent to the adoption of the present Constitution of the United States in a state of great disorder and exposure; and in a situation neither safe nor honorable to the Nation."<sup>1</sup> The bill, which was subsequently introduced, concerned not only the older records but also those of the State, War, and Navy Departments. But, following this manifestation of interest, there was little activity in Congress for the preservation of archives for many years to come.

More than a decade after the Civil War, in the Annual Report to the Secretary of War for 1878, Quartermaster General Meigs called attention to the danger of destruction of records by fire, and "urges that a cheap building be

<sup>1</sup> Speech of Clifton A. Woodrum. House of Representatives, March 13, 1935.



constructed as a hall of records...one which, while inexpensive, should be perfectly fireproof...to cost about \$200,000, to be built entirely of brick."<sup>1</sup> A design for such a building was drafted, the intent being to furnish a building "for the preservation of the records of the executive departments not required for daily reference." The proposal met the approval of President Hayes, and a site was selected for an archives building, at Square 172, 17th Streets and New York Avenue. But no action was taken. A similar bill met the same fate, though introduced and passed in the Senate immediately after two fires, in the winter of 1881, had damaged and destroyed many of the records belonging in the Department of the Secretary of War. After this date, the proposals for archives buildings were many, asking in their appropriations for slightly over a million dollars. As possible locations, there were many suggestions, including Armory Square, Power House Square, and the Botanic Gardens.

Annual reports of other of the Cabinet members repeated the urgency of the need. In some of these reports and recommendations, the vision of an archives repository resembles more nearly that of a storage warehouse, as in the Report of the Secretary of the Treasury for 1890, "a building devoted exclusively to the storage of papers which it is deemed necessary to preserve but which are seldom referred to."<sup>2</sup>

1 Senate Document. No. 297. p. 3. 62d Cong. 2d Session.  
2 Ibid. p.5.



The Secretary of War again repeated the plea in his report for 1898, stating that "The files not in current use should be stored elsewhere. A hall of records becomes more and more necessary each year."<sup>1</sup> So in the Annual Reports of the Postmaster-General, of the Attorney-General, and of the Secretaries of the Navy, the Treasury, and the Interior, like sentiments may be found. In all of these recommendations for a building, the proposals were for a single repository which would serve for all departments of the government. It was not because of a feeling of jealousy among the departments that all legislation was blocked, but rather the attitude of Congress and at times the rival interests of real estate men in Washington.

The conditions which existed to cause such concern for the methods of storing records and anxiety for their preservation from destruction by fire were deplorable. Storage was an immediate problem with each separate department of the government. In the Department of the Navy, for instance, there had been a small amount of storage space which was speedily filled to capacity. Garrets and hallways, lined with shelves, then received the overflow. The departments might employ two remedies to relieve the situation: they might hire other buildings for such storage, and they might destroy their so-called "useless" papers. Neither of these means provided more than a temporary solution. The total rental to the government of numbers of



such storage buildings has been tremendous, and the records destroyed from such a motive cannot be said to have been fairly judged.

The City of Washington was becoming a stuffed city. Papers of the federal departments were scattered over many miles of territory, stored in cellars, in attics, porticos, closed doorways, even in carbarns and in the old theater building where Lincoln was shot. The location of some of these storage places would be amusing if not significant of a shameful disregard and ignorance. The old Corcoran Art Gallery was one of the places used for storage of Government records, those in the basement of the building being accessible only with the aid of rubber overshoes, or, in a wet season, "by means of some old shutters laid on the basement floor."<sup>1</sup> The Treasury, the General Land Office, the Pension Office where the archives of the Indian office were stored in the courtyard, all suffered from similar conditions. Under the small dome of the Capitol were stored in open boxes the files of the House of Representatives, with every good chance of igniting from contact with the dome under a hot sun.

Aside from the danger of fire, poor storage of documents leads to their deterioration. Moisture and mould are two agencies which effect such deterioration swiftly. Extreme dryness also tends to cause paper to become brittle and to crumble. When rats, mice, and worms have added their

1 Congressional Record. Vol. 78, p. 12,184.

Report of J. Franklin Jameson, submitted in 1914, quoted in speech of John G. Bradley.



destructive work, there seems little else to fear.

Yet in a system which permits such haphazard storage of records, the loss by misplacing and by theft must be considerable. In the first case, some files may be thought to have been destroyed, or to have been stored all in one place. Again, they may have been stored in one place and later transferred perhaps several times, and record of them lost. As regards theft, there will always be the unscrupulous persons who, given the opportunity, would not hesitate to remove a few papers that looked interesting, which bore foreign or old stamps on the wrappings, which would perhaps contribute to an autograph collection, or which might bring in a few pennies from a book dealer, with no questions asked. There might also be those persons interested in destroying certain evidence who could, among records carelessly kept, gain access to it and cause irreparable harm.

The fire loss among American archives has been considerable though not comparatively as great as that in European archives. Statistics show that in the forty-five years ending in 1915 there were two hundred and fifty fires on Government property in the District of Columbia.<sup>1</sup> Very early in its history the United States lost valuable records when the Department of War building burned in 1800. Other fires were those in the Post-Office building in 1836, and in the Patent Office three years later, causing serious loss. Still another fire occurred in the Patent Office in 1877,

1 Congressional Record. Vol. 53, p.1113. 64th Congress, 1st Session.



and two more, already mentioned, in the Department of War within a few years. Nor have the state archives escaped without loss, the most disastrous being the destruction of the State Capitol at Albany in 1911; the same year saw the burning of records again at the Capitol in Jefferson City, Missouri.<sup>1</sup> Estimates of such losses in county courthouses and in the wooden structures used as City Halls in small cities have not been compiled. Yet where can the village be found whose inhabitants do not recall the night the townhouse burned?

Loss of records by fire has proved the fallacy of hoping to protect them by fire-proof buildings. Walls may be of brick, floors and stairways of marble, doors of bronze, fixtures, stacks, and shelves of steel, but if the building is filled with combustible material, it will burn if fire starts. Buildings properly constructed for the purpose of housing records will furnish every means possible for preventing a fire and will give the utmost protection to the documents should a fire start.

Fire damage is irremediable. Though science has done much to make possible the restoration of documents which have been faded, obliterated with inks, stained with acid, eaten with mould, even of those documents which have been badly charred, yet there is nothing which science can do when fire has done its worst. Fire is still the greatest enemy of our documents as it was when Agarde wrote, in 1610, in England,

1 American Historical Association. Report. 1911. Vol. II.  
p.314.



"There is a fower-fould hurte, that by negligence may bring wracke to records; that is to say Fier, Water, Rates and Mice, Misplacinge."<sup>1</sup>

Thus far the aim in attempted legislation had been to provide a safe place for the archives. There was little suggestion that under an archival administration, the business of government might be transacted to better advantage than ever before. That there was need of reform in the manner of conducting business was manifested in the statements of the Cockrell Report of 1887 which had been that of a select committee appointed to "examine the methods of business and work in the executive departments... and the causes of delay in transacting the public business."<sup>2</sup> Of importance in their statement of existing conditions was the emphasis given to the fact that, in 1870, there had been organized the Bureau of Indexes and Archives, consolidating six divisions of the Department of State and that this consolidation had effected great improvement in the functioning of that Department. In the Department of War also, it was pointed out, the concentration of records had brought about a marked improvement.

No study of space requirements had been made previous to 1896, which would include all departments of the government. In that year, tentative figures were submitted and a total of 4,000,000 cubic feet of space was judged necessary for an archives building, providing in

1 Jenkinson, Hilary: A manual of archive administration.

2 Sen. Report No. 507. 50th Cong. 1st Session. p.3. [p.45.]



this figure for accumulations over "a moderate period." This was in 1896, and 1897.<sup>1</sup>

Before 1900, the events of the year 1898 had caused an unforeseen increase in the accumulation of papers in all departments of the government. At once the estimate of space requirement jumped to 5,000,000 cubic feet.<sup>2</sup> In the report of 1902, the files of the Treasury Department showed an increase in bulk which almost doubled the estimate of six years before. Thus it was seen that in providing for space requirements, figures and tabulations were necessary over a period of years in order to allow for a normal rate of increase and to provide some estimate of increase under the unusual circumstances of a foreign war.

This study of space requirements and estimates of the probable rate of accumulation of records was significant of a more serious attempt on the part of Congress to meet the situation. It led, in 1903, to the passage of legislation which gave a more optimistic aspect to the future of the archives than any which had been attempted. This was the Act authorizing the Secretary of the Treasury to purchase for a hall of records the property known as Square 143, at F and E, and 18th and 19th Streets.<sup>3</sup> An appropriation accompanied the Act, allowing for plans to be made of a building not to exceed two million dollars in cost. Efforts, through 1904, were expended in securing the site through condemnation proceedings and litigations.

1 Sen. Doc. No. 297, p.9. 62d Cong. 2d Session.

2 Ibid. p.10.

3 U.S. Stat. L. Vol. 32, p.1212.



The Secretary of the Treasury in 1905 requested of Congress the appropriation for undertaking the work of construction of a building, the plans being already in the hands of the legislature. There was no action taken either on the plans or on the request of the Secretary. The next year he again urged the appropriation and on finding that no action could be obtained he rented the property which had been intended for the erection of an archives building to other bureaus of the government.

This did not discourage many other bills of a similar nature from coming before Congress, sometimes originating in the House and sometimes in the Senate. Henceforth, such bills were largely concerned with surveys of space, with the rate of accumulation, and rental economies. The survey of 1906 was made in an endeavor to determine the amount of rental paid by the Government for these separate storage houses for documents. The figures showed that the Government spent \$37,600, annually. The space which might be obtained by the clearance of documents from buildings in which clerical forces could then be accommodated was said to be 24,526 square feet.<sup>1</sup>

One of the bills introduced at this time was that brought before the Senate by Mr. Lodge.<sup>2</sup> It is of interest mainly because of the archives personnel which he advocated. The bill provided for a record office and for a board of record commissioners, the membership of which reflects

1 Sen. Doc. No. 297. p.12.

2 Ibid. p.13.



the changing conception of an archivist's responsibility. The proposed board was to be made up of the Vice-President, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Attorney General, a justice of the Supreme Court, a justice of the Court of Claims, an associate justice of the Circuit courts, a justice of the District courts, and members of a Joint Committee to be appointed by Congress. This formidable board was to have "sole" authority of all the records which were more than eighty years old, and the custody of certain others which were to be designated by the President of the United States. This was one of the last of the pre-war attempts to secure legislation for the archives and it too met with no encouragement from Congress.

In 1908, a letter from George B. Cortelyou, then Secretary of the Treasury to the Speaker of the House stated that the Treasury Department had filled to capacity all the buildings which it had rented. He further suggested that, if Congress contemplated doing anything to relieve the situation, it go the whole way and provide an efficient archival administration. Cortelyou elaborated on the nature of the work of the Treasury Department and the necessity of having access to the oldest of its archives. The blame for inefficiency from the Department was placed unmistakeably on inaccessibility "except with great labor" of the archives of the Department.



Little progress was made in the next few years, save for the entrance of the American Historical Association into the field, working independently through the organs of the Association and through Congress as well, under the leadership of Dr. J. Franklin Jameson. By 1910, all hope of reserving Square 143 for an archives building had dwindled and disappeared. The Treasury Department had finally disposed of the property to other government bureaus, the Geological Survey, the office of Indian Affairs, the office of the Reclamation Service, the General Land Office and the Bureau of Mines. The disposal of this property was accepted as a general defeat in spite of the fact that President Taft in 1912 expressed his willingness to continue the fight.<sup>1</sup>

One more abortive attempt was made previous to the outbreak of war. This was in the Public Buildings Act of 1913, providing for a general program of construction of government buildings.<sup>1</sup> An archives building was to be one of a number of edifices designed to beautify the City of Washington. The outbreak of the World War checked this activity before any plans had been definitely made, and, having no way of foreseeing how the progress of the war might affect the creation of documents, Congress declined to make further estimates. From 1913 to 1925, there was an obvious lack of interest in the matter of providing for archives though their increase in these years was tremendous.

<sup>1</sup> Speech of Clifton A. Woodrum. p.5. House of Representatives, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1935.



Thus far the efforts of thirty years had witnessed little of material gain. The departments had moved from a desire to relieve themselves of the pressure of documents accumulating faster than they could be stored, to obtain a storage warehouse. Gradually they had come to appreciate more fully the nature of the problem in all its aspects, and, accompanying the urgency of the need of protection for their records the departments were coming to realize the desirability of an archives system which would aid immeasurably in carrying on the functions of government.



EFFORTS OF THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
TO OBTAIN AN ARCHIVES ADMINISTRATION

1900-1913

An adequate history of the National Archives would be impossible without a review of the accomplishments of the American Historical Association, particularly of its Public Archives Commission. The Association was founded in 1884 and chartered by an Act of Congress in 1889. Article II of the Constitution states that the "object shall be the promotion of historical studies." The Historical Manuscripts Commission was formed early, and in 1899, at an annual meeting held in Boston, the Public Archives Commission was established.

The relation of this second Commission to the Historical Manuscripts Commission, as defined in the report following the first meeting, is a practical recognition of the distinction between archives and historical documents. The Public Archives Commission declared that its interest was to be centered only in "documentary material of a public or governmental nature."<sup>1</sup> There was no intent to publish such documents but rather to concentrate on obtaining for state archives a uniform legislation and to

1 American Historical Association. Report. 1911. Vol. II.  
p. 6.



provide students of history with as many finding lists of available material as possible. In both of these aims the Public Archives Commission was most successful. The field of historical documents was left to the Historical Manuscripts Commission which undertook the work of publishing much of this material, with a scholarship which influenced such publication everywhere in America.

Other countries in Europe and in England have similar historical societies. The object of the Royal Historical Manuscripts Commission of England was the publication of historical material which was the property of private individuals. It did not attempt legislative reform. The American Historical Association has been likened also to the National Academy of Sciences because of its government relationship.

The work of the Public Archives Commission was at first in the field of state archives. Over a period of years there were published in the Annual Reports surveys of conditions in the various state archive depositories. Each survey was written by one who knew the collection, often by the archivist himself. These surveys showed that archival practice differed considerable in the states in regulations governing their creation, preservation, and in the efforts put forth to secure publication and to provide for proper cataloging. When the Commission was ten years



old, a summary of its accomplishments showed that, through its endeavors, twenty-four of the states had passed legislative measures relating to the better preservation and custody of archives, and through the publication of the individual state accounts, students had been advised of the contents of state archives throughout the country.

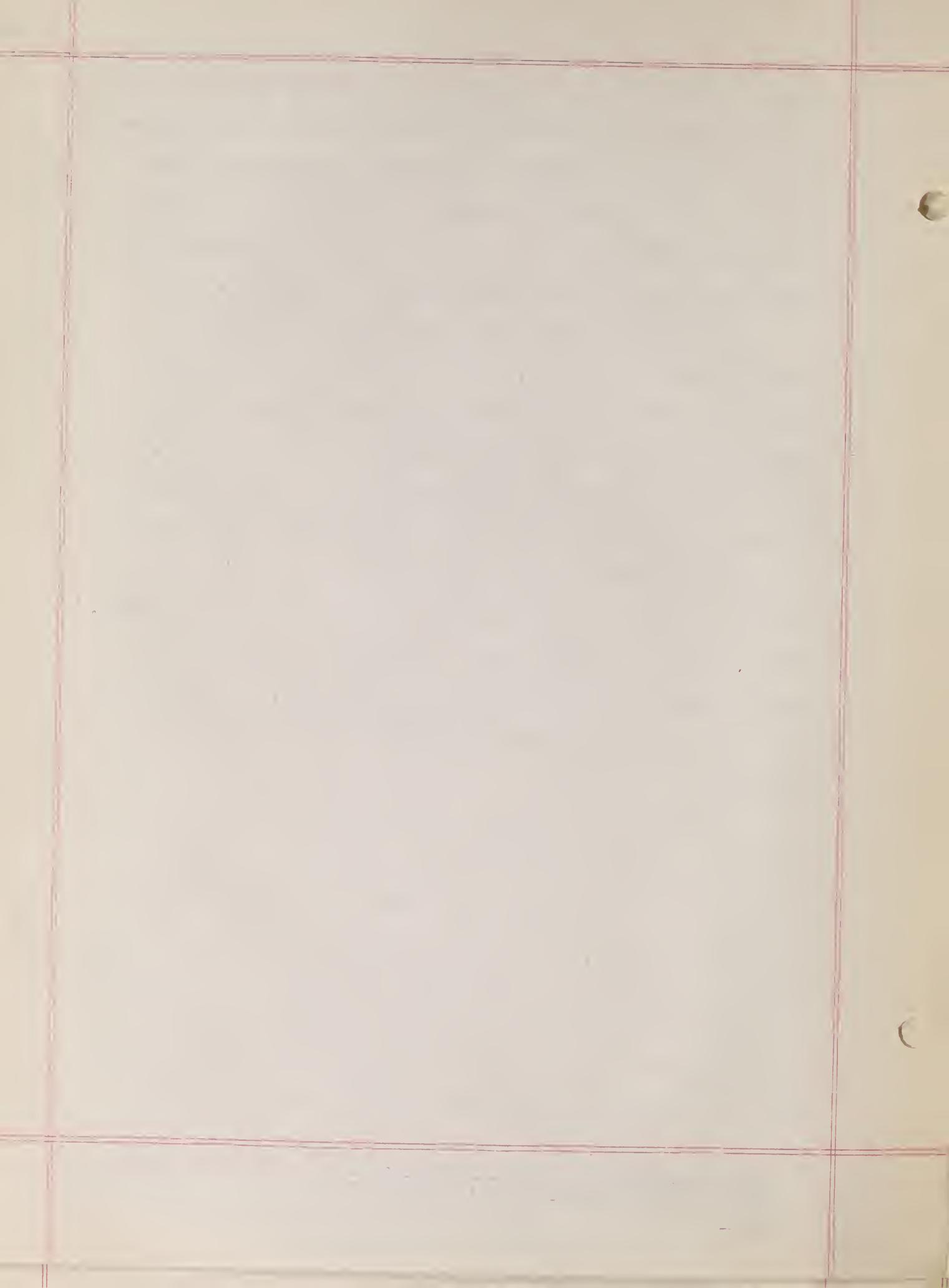
Massachusetts was one of the first to submit a report to the Commission.<sup>1</sup> It is noted with not a little pride that that state was credited with having the best legislation for the control of county and town records. Massachusetts appointed a commissioner of public records, who is now called the Supervisor, and he was charged with the task of enforcing the laws regarding the making of records on linen rag paper only, and by using standard inks.<sup>2</sup> Other requirements were those concerning fireproof storage, punishment of violations of the law, and the transfer of all archives by one official to his successor, on leaving his position.<sup>3</sup>

Massachusetts has one irregular feature in its archival organization in that the papers of the General Court are in the custody of the Secretary of State rather than the Supervisor of Records. This is in accordance with a provision of the Constitution of the state. The Secretary has appointed an archivist who is his deputy in charge of these records. The archivist, however, is not in charge of the state archives, which remain under the separate de-

1 American Historical Association. Report. Vol. II. 1900.

2 Mass. Revised Laws. Chap. 35. Secs. 1-23. p. 47-50.

3 Ibid. Chap. 162. Secs. 31, 52.



partments which created them, but only of those records which emanate from the office of the Secretary of State, the General Court Records, and papers from the Council Chamber. The archives of the General Court, which make up the largest part of the so-called archives, have a great interest for the student of history who is fortunate enough to discover them. For these archives are made up of legislation which failed of enactment. That which succeeded in being acted upon may be found in the printed Journals of the House, but not that which has been stored in the archives under such headings as "non-concurred", or "no legislation necessary" or "leave to withdraw", etc. The same condition holds for the earlier records of the General Court, most of which have been published. There remains unpublished, and in this case in manuscript, the vast amount of legislation which failed of enactment. Both the Massachusetts Historical Society and the American Antiquarian Society have done much in the way of publishing historical papers for Massachusetts.

With the completion of surveys of conditions in the state archives, the Public Archives Commission turned to other phases of archival activity. One of these was a plan for preparation of a practical manual for the use of archivists, treating of such problems as the storage, mounting, classification, cataloging, and administration. Another was the interest in plans for a National Archives,



stimulated in all probability by the reports of members who had attended the conference in Brussels, August, 1910, and who had brought back new ideas from the Continent.

The conference at Brussels was an International Conference of Archivists and Librarians. Many of the subjects discussed at this Congress, as it was called, were of interest to those who dreamed of a National Archives for the United States. The American Historical Association sent four representatives. England sent but two, and of those two, a comment from "Library" and English journal, which is quoted in the report of the American Historical Association for 1910, stated that they took "very little, if any, interest in the section on archives, the profession of archivist being practically unknown here."<sup>1</sup> Forty-nine institutions were represented, twenty-two of them being archives depositories. Holland, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Russia, and England were represented, beside the United States. Preparations for the conference had been made three years in advance and learned papers had been prepared for discussion. Those whom the American Historical Association sent to the meeting were four who were well fitted to take their places at such a gathering. Their work in archives and in historical manuscripts was outstanding. They were: Waldo Gifford Leland, Worthington Chauncey Ford, Gaillard Hunt, and Henry E. Woods.

<sup>1</sup> American Historical Association. Report. 1910. p.315.



Several resolutions were proposed and adopted at this meeting which were later announced in the archival policies of the United States as set forth by Waldo Gifford Leland. One of these was a resolution concerning the centralization of records: another, which will be discussed further, was the resolution adopting the principle of classification as it is followed in all countries today. Of no little importance to the United States was the interest aroused from such contact with European archivists, whose profession was regarded with greatest respect and whose archival treasure houses were examples of the finest architectural beauty.

The American Historical Association became aware that its greatest service to students of history might lie in the championship of the cause for a National Archives. Thus far the Association had not announced a definite policy in regard to the public archives of the United States. As early as 1900, through a bill introduced by J. William Stokes, Congress had asked that the Association make surveys of federal archives similar to those made of the state archives. Nothing had been undertaken, and though in 1908, the executive council of the Association voted to present a memorial to Congress on the subject of a National Archives, the active interest of the Association did not manifest itself until 1910. The following resolve was adopted:



"The American Historical Association, concerned for the preservation of the records of the National Government as muments of our national advancement and as material which historians must use in order to ascertain the truth; and aware that the records are in many cases now stored where they are in danger of destruction from fire, and in places which are not adapted to their preservation, and they are inaccessible for administrative and historical purposes; and knowing that many of the records of the Government have in the past been lost or destroyed because suitable provision for their care and preservation was not made, do respectfully petition the Congress of the United States to take such steps as may be necessary to erect in the city of Washington a national archive depository, where the records of the Government may be concentrated, properly cared for, and preserved."<sup>1</sup>

It was natural that the Public Archives Commission should be the most active in furthering the work of the Association. The reports of their meetings from 1911 are filled with discussions of problems of archival procedure such as could not be found in any books of library science. While Congress was making its sporadic attempts at legislation, the Association was developing a school of archivists and preparing the way for an archives administration.

From the time of the International Congress, attention centered in the question of control of the archives. There was a feeling that, although each separate department should relinquish the custody of its papers, it should retain administrative control. There were several arguments against this plan but the fact that it had been tried in the Public Record Office in England and had admittedly failed, was the point held out against it by the American Historical Association.

<sup>1</sup> Sen. Doc. No. 297. p. 14. 62d Congress, 2d Session.



There was also an opinion that the custody of the archives should be the duty of the Librarian of Congress. This feeling in regard to the Librarian was perhaps due to a confusion of the two classes of papers, the archives and the historical documents. It could not then have been foreseen that the administration, classification, and cataloging of the archives would be so entirely different from the treatment of the historical documents.

Finally there were the recommendations for a historical commission, not unlike a board of trustees, which commission might manage to cooperate, administrate, and to be equally responsible, but which probably would not. Slowly the conviction grew that only by a centralized authority could the business of archives be carried on, and that such authority should rest in a single individual, aided by some sort of an advisory board which should be made up of a fairly representative group of archivists, historians, librarians, executives, and business men.

The one discussion led to another, the qualifications of a good archivist. It was generally conceded that the same qualifications desirable in an archivist on the Continent would not be essential here, that is, the training in diplomatics, paleography, numismatics, and chronology. Nor must he necessarily be a linguist. The tendency on the Continent was to place as much emphasis on a legal preparation as on a historical, though there was not



a unanimous opinion in this matter. In England, quite definitely the sentiment had been expressed that the archivist should have no personal interest in the subject of history. If he should consider his archives as materials for history rather than as active agents in the administration of government, he would appear as a poor archivist to the English.<sup>1</sup> These varying opinions were considered in meetings of the Public Archives Commission and the general standard of archives work was thought of as superior to library work. Library training was considered an advantage, with qualifications, but of absolute necessity was the background of American history, and training in federal administration, and in administrative law. French and German were recommended. To these requisites there was added the American necessity for the archivist to be one who possessed the faculties which would enable him to procure from an unsympathetic Congress the annual appropriations.

The work of preparing a manual for the use of archivists had not met with success previous to the war. It was too soon to attempt to formulate principles when the study was in an experimental stage, even on the Continent. In Europe, three Dutch scholars had written a manual which was being generally followed. In 1910, the work of these men, Drs. Muller, Feith, and Fruin, was translated into French. This work, called "Manuel pour le Classement..." and well known to archivists as Dewey is to library students,

<sup>1</sup>Jenkinson, Hilary: A manual of archive administration. p.106.



was the main guidepost of American students of the theory of archival economy. There was no opportunity for its principles to be practically applied in the United States. For that reason active interest waned, and the writing in preparation for the manual, except for the work of Waldo Gifford Leland and Claude Halstead Van Tyne, was not exceptional.



## ARCHIVAL ECONOMY

The greatest service which the American Historical Association has given to the progress of the National Archives is in the development of a school of archival economy which has prepared the way for the handling of the archives themselves. Although the group which became interested in archive problems was small and had no opportunity of putting their theories into practice, they watched critically the experiments made in Europe and in England and also in the separate departments of the government here, and profiting by their mistakes, the group thus interested formulated definite policies which will influence to a great degree the present problems of procedure.

One of the most noticeable and most American of these archival policies is the attitude which is taken toward students, in that their needs will be considered equally with the needs of service to government. Unlike countries in Europe, the student will not need to obtain letters of introduction from statesmen in order to be admitted to the archives. Thirty years ago the door was being closed to students who sought to obtain access to



records which were manuscript and original. The change has not come in the character of the student: the matter of his integrity must remain an unknown factor. It is rather in the conviction of those who would make archival economy a success that the burden of protecting the documents must be assumed by the library which contains them. Admission should be granted to all, provided the research demands documentary materials, and the system should be so provided for that theft and mutilation of papers is impossible. If a high degree of general moral character were an indication that documents were safe in a research worker's hands, the problem might perhaps be simplified by such letters of recommendation as the archives of Europe require of students. But many trusted patrons of libraries both here and abroad have shown strange lack of responsibility in their attitude toward manuscript sources of history. In more than one state of the Union, the source material used by the state historians has not been available for check by later students because of this quirk in human nature.

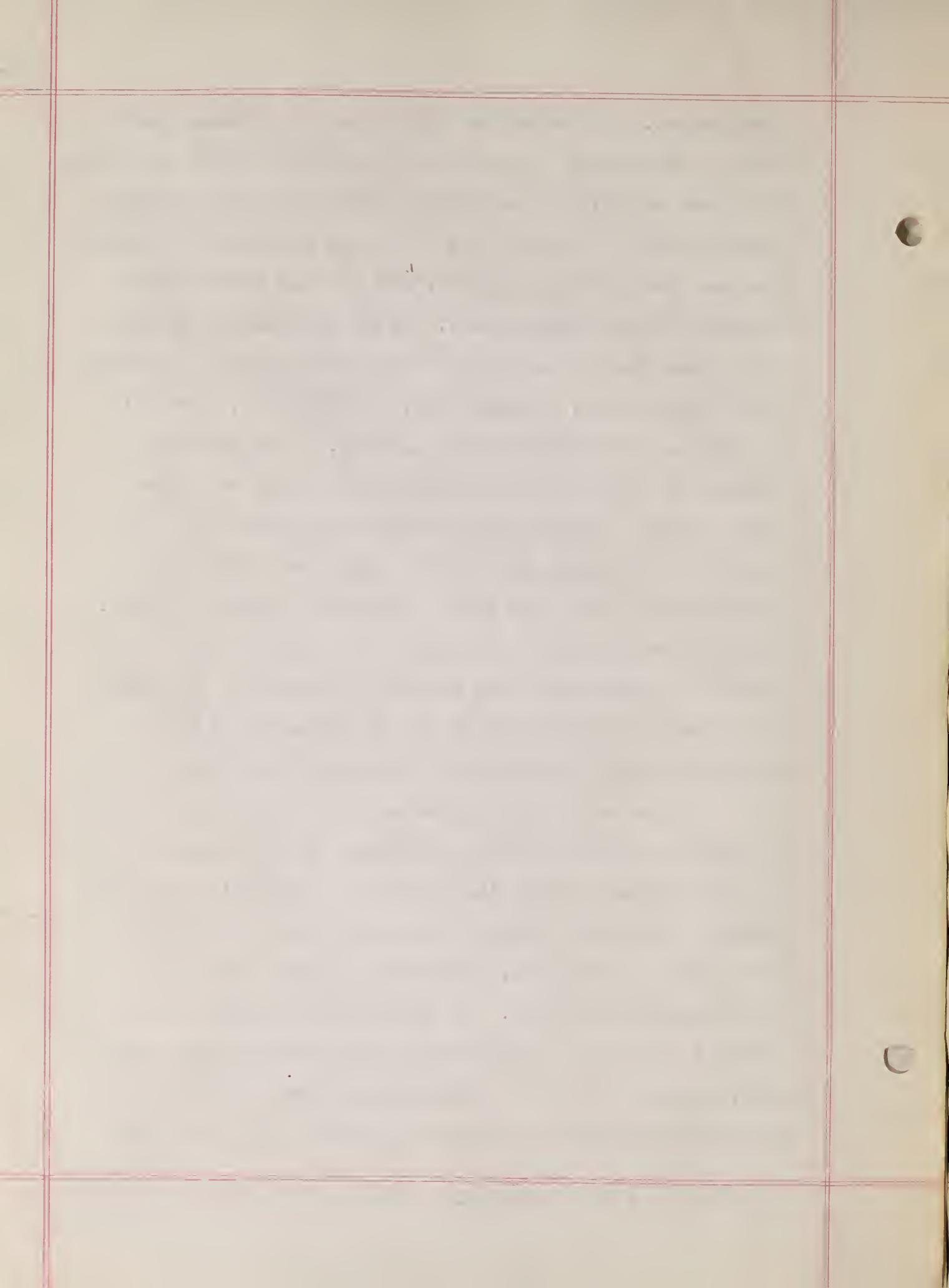
The right of the student to use historical materials was a subject which came to the fore and was discussed at great length and given much publicity about 1912, when the attitude of Dr. Ainsworth of the Department of War aroused so much opposition. As Adjutant-General of the Army, Ainsworth had been given a position in charge of the records of military service. He was a systematic and tire-



less worker. He devised an admirable card catalog which made it unnecessary to refer to the actual records for data. He worked so long and so hard in perfecting this catalog that he came to think of the cards "as of typhoid patients who must be carefully guarded." He refused admission to any who were not Congressmen. Tremendous clamor and protest arose when he declined to admit such men as Worthington Chauncey Ford, William Dodd, H.R. McIlwain, Frederic L. Paxson, and Charles McLean Andrews. The American Historical Association declared it the right of a student to have access to such sources of history, and defended this stand by pointing out that such right was guaranteed to him by an Act of Congress of March 3, 1901. The extremes to which protection of documents might be carried had been well demonstrated. Interest then turned to the means by which the safety of documents might be achieved by guarding them more carefully during use.

There was a real problem, in the question of access to archival records, in the settlement of the deadline. On the Continent it was the practice to determine upon a single date as the deadline and after that date the files were closed to students, no matter what the subject of their research might be. In England for a long time the archives could not be referred to for periods later than 1848, and even as late as 1900, England had admitted only a few special students to her archives of the period of

<sup>1</sup> Editorial from The Nation. Feb. 22, 1912. Vol. 94, p. 76-75, 179-81.



the American Civil War. On the Continent the archives were closed in some countries from the year 1830.

The reasons for having a deadline are never obvious to the student who is intent upon his own research, who intends to pursue his subject in a manner true to the highest standards of history, and whose field of interest will concern only a small group of fellow historians.

In pursuance of such research, however, certain governmental transactions might be disturbed. An international disagreement might result from scholarly interpretation of a legal point. "Too much scholarly research is a menace to national interest."<sup>1</sup> When, in 1909, the Hague closed its archives on the subject of the Newfoundland Fisheries from the date 1818, it was because international conditions might be affected by publication of certain facts concerning this controversy, which, until agreement was reached, might better be left undisturbed. That restriction of archival material in such instances was a necessity was acknowledged by the archivists. That an absolute deadline was desirable, was denied.

The main points to consider in placing restrictions upon the use of material were briefly stated by Waldo Gifford-Leland.<sup>2</sup> The archives should not be closed, if the incidents with which they are concerned are already completed; nor if danger of inciting public opinion is past; if no international negotiations are pending; if the material is not

1 American Historical Association. Report. 1910.  
Article by Frederic Paxson.

2 Sen. Doc. No. 717. 63d Cong. 3d Session. 1915. p. 27.



detrimental to government interest; or, in the case of an individual, if two generations have since passed. Thus the nature of the archive will govern the placing of the deadline. The tendency at present is to require no such limitation unless governmental interest obviously requires it, and in cases where such limitation is necessary to choose the most recent date possible. It is to be hoped that, in cases where a deadline is imposed, the matter will not then be left, as it has happened in Europe, until the next general war has caused a new advance of the deadline.

The importance of archives to the welfare of a nation and the happiness of its individuals has not been so fully appreciated by us in this country as in Europe. Possession of an institution such as the National Archives may be of great service in awakening a national pride in the records which are, in a sense, an evidence of our civilization. The State bases its protection against unfounded claims in the possession of archives. It is from archives that arguments may be drawn to support the government, even though the archives referred to have been inactive since they were first created. Concerning the happiness of individuals in the United States, the titles of millions of acres of lands which once were public, rest in the archives.<sup>1</sup> Though they might never be used, the fact that archives exist is one of the protections which every civilized government gives

<sup>1</sup>Sen. Doc. No. 717. 63d Cong. 3d Session. p.5.



to its people as evidence of good faith.

No better subject for debate can be suggested than that of the destruction of useless archives. All nations have regulations governing such destruction, ours being by Act of Congress of 1889. A committee of House and Senate was delegated the task of determining the archives which might be destroyed. England, by a statutory regulation, has provided for destruction of records since 1877.<sup>1</sup> The conditions under which archives should be destroyed had small regard for the interest of historians until the activity of the American Historical Association drew attention to the value of archives as material for history.

Age was one of the factors which first governed destruction. If a document were a hundred years old, it would not be destroyed; but records which had been kept for five or ten years were often judged worthless. A record had to be taken of the nature of documents so destroyed, and a statement of the disposal of them filed. It was a matter of greatest interest to the members of the American Historical Association that such archives as were of historical value might not be thus disposed of. They recognized the two distinct values of archives, the one being the functional value and the other the record, or historical value. The latter was not always appreciated by those who had closest contact with the archives. The Association bent its energies toward securing the appointment of a historical

1 Jenkinson, Hilary: A manual of archive administration. p.116.



commission to advise on documents said to be useless, before their actual destruction. They were successful in obtaining the addition of the Librarian of Congress to the committee which passed on the documents. Because of his experience in the field of historical documents, the Association was satisfied that the Librarian might be depended on to salvage for future historians much evidence that might otherwise be consigned to the flames.<sup>1.</sup>

By some it has been suggested that all manuscript material which has been put into print should be adjudged useless. This presupposes that such manuscript will not be referred to again, which is not often the case. Until a infallible race of editors is produced, as someone has expressed it, there can be no dependence on the printed word or figure.<sup>2.</sup> In practice, the printing of material greatly stimulates the demand for the original. This is true of archives as well as of historical documents and ancient manuscripts. In the matter of such archives as contribute to the statistics of annual reports, such material could be destroyed after publication and after the required number of years had elapsed. That original muster rolls of war service could be destroyed on the ground that these records were in print must be denied.

Active interest in archives and in historical documents as well was manifested by those students who went to the archives and libraries of England and France to obtain

1 American Historical Association. Report.

2 Gilson, Julius P.: A student's guide to the manuscripts of the British Museum. p.16.



transcripts, inventories, and calendars. Toward the furtherance of this work the Carnegie Institution and the Rockefeller Foundation contributed sums regularly and generously.<sup>1</sup> The United States was far behind other countries in this work in foreign archives. Early in the present century the American Historical Association undertook the work of obtaining transcripts from the British archives for the Library of Congress under the supervision of Professor Charles M. Andrews, and from the French archives through the work of Waldo G. Leland.

There were difficulties in obtaining transcripts other than the cost of the undertaking. Few persons are capable of attempting such work. Only those students who have had some preparation, either by training or experience, can read the original manuscript. A high degree of accuracy is absolutely essential in the copying of the most trivial word or the placing of punctuation. Finally there is so great an abundance of patience required of those who engage in such labor, patience and good eyesight, with small hope of adequate reward for the contribution thus made to history sources, that very few persons are willing to undertake the work.

The task of making inventories is no less arduous. Through the inventory, the contents of a given collection may be summarily reviewed. The value of such inventories to students is evidenced by the ever increasing demand for

1 Summary of a paper by Thomas P. Martin. In Bulletin of American Library Association. 1929. Vol. 23: 310-11.



them. Inventories vary in the fullness of detail which is given, but the common practice is to make them little more than lists which will aid the student in determining whether or not, in a group of documents, any are worth his more careful consideration. The importance to students of history of this type of source material will encourage the making of inventories of archive material in this country in many more departments of the government than has been possible heretofore.

The object of the calendar is to bring out the important subjects which are mentioned in a single document to the end that the document itself need not be perused, except for quotation or in cases of most careful research.<sup>1</sup> It is a summary of the material which exists in the manuscript. The term is also used to refer to the complete set of calendars or calendar entries which are included in the collection. Calendar entries are the most difficult to make of these types of source material. All personality must be submerged in order that the integrity of the word as it was written may be preserved in the calendar. Great care must be exercised that the subject material is all included and in its true proportion. Because of the skill and the learning necessary for the making of good calendars, the cost is almost prohibitive. It exceeds the cost of copy work. Sometimes historical documents have been provided with all three of these aids to their study, the

1 Ford, Worthington Chauncey: On calendaring manuscripts.  
Bibliographical Society of America. Papers. Vol. 4, 1910.  
pp. 45-56.



inventory, the calendar, and the transcript. All of them have value, greatest value being dependent on the work to be done. Students of history appreciate in the calendar the arrangement by chronology of the documents, whence comes the name of calendar.

Of recent years, photostatic reproduction has supplanted to a degree all of these methods of obtaining source material for history. Photographic processes also are coming to the fore, though the possibilities in their future have not been fully developed. A new day may be at hand in the methods of procuring archive material from foreign countries. Reproduction such as these two methods make possible ensures accuracy, and saves in time, labor and expense if done on a large scale.

Desirable as such reproduction of documents may be to the historian who has his work well under way, there can be nothing which will take the place of a good calendarer. By making available the material of a single document in a few brief sentences, omitting nothing of importance, and adding nothing by way of interpretation, a calendarer can make it possible for a research worker to read a whole volume of such documents in a single afternoon. Reproduction of the original cannot be a substitute for that. Nor can the transcript be lightly dismissed. For the original document, though written in perfect English, may yet be foreign to American eyes. It is still indispensable



that a transcript be made, lest in working from the original, concentration on orthography or lack of punctuation interfere with the thought which must be given to the substance of the document.

In England, archival policy was showing certain differences from the European practice. One of these was the English concept of the nature of an archive. Not only must an archive originate in a department of the government, but also, in order to qualify as an archive, it must have remained there or in some archival repository. It must, in other words, be able to establish its pedigree, or it may not be accepted as an archive. Administrative papers in the custody of the British Museum would not be given full archival value, nor indeed, would they be received into the British archives, according to the theory expressed by Hilary Jenkinson. Scornfully he comments on the opposite policy held in Europe: "For with all due respect to the eminent authorities of the Belgian Archives, we cannot think that a stray paper from some dispersed family collection, itself picked up in a sale, is a fit inmate for a National Archives Establishment."<sup>1</sup>

A great many of the archives of the United States have been dispersed, because of our lack of a centralized control of them. Our policy in regard to these papers has not been determined. Examples of papers which should have remained in the files are those papers of the presidents

<sup>1</sup> Jenkinson, Hilary: Manual of archive administration. p.44.



which were taken to be the personal property of a great many of the occupants of the White House. In most cases these papers or letters have come into the hands of historical societies, either by gift or by purchase, and they have received special attention from these bodies. Other archives which have been dispersed and which have been often published and edited by non-governmental agencies are official letters of diplomats, consuls and other officers whose residences have been abroad. Sometimes there are gaps in archival serials which can be filled in by purchases from booksellers. Though the English have decried this practice, there is a strong temptation to perfect the incomplete archive, trusting that the validity of the document remains intact.

The question whether or not all archives should be transferred to the central depository was long a subject of discussion. In state archives, there are local records such as vital statistics which are compiled by the town and which remain in the town though created by the authority of the state. But national archives do not have local records comparable to these. It was at first argued that the executive heads of the departments should decide whether their archives should be transferred. That this would result in a serious lack of uniformity was soon realized, and the entire willingness of the executive heads to coöperate in the concentration of archives has



made simple the establishment of the principle governing the transfer of all archives of all branches of the government, legislative, executive, judicial, and other.

The time when such transfers shall be made will depend on the archives. As long as they are considered "current" within their department, transfer will not be made. Some papers of relatively recent date may be transferred at varying and irregular intervals, but the advantages of periodic transfer of other archives have been considered. In Europe such removal of papers from the departments to the depots is regular and uniform for all, whether current or not. But the time of transfer is less recent, and the possibility of such archives being in demand by the department is less. In the United States, it is the aim to provide such efficient service to the government that the transfers will be made as soon as possible, much more attention being given to this function of archival administration than is given to it in Europe.

No evidence can be found to show that any of the departments of the government will resent the transfer of their records to a central depository. The attitude of the executives is one of a general relief. In 1894, in a defense of the work of the Department of State in caring for its archives, Andrew Hussey Allen made the statement that the Department was in need of an archives division of its own with a separate building and an archivist.<sup>1</sup> This is the

<sup>1</sup> American Historical Association. Report. 1894.



only statement which can be found to explain the objections which, according to Gaillard Hunt, would stand in the way of a National Archives.<sup>1</sup> He made the assertion, in 1910, that each department of the government would be loath to have any of its functions taken away, that the departments wanted separate, new buildings rather than a single depository. Nothing since has been noted which could give support to the contention, and the fact that the several Cabinet members have worked so assiduously to attain the new institution is sufficient evidence that the fear of non-coöperation is groundless.

Even before the Act establishing the National Archives had been planned, there had occurred an incident concerning the archives of New Mexico which illustrates the power of the government to interfere.<sup>2</sup> The archives of New Mexico had been rich in historical documents. In 1870, the American governor of the territory allowed many of them to be sold to the merchants of Santa Fe as wrapping paper. The Librarian of Congress endeavored to secure the remainder and offered, in 1899, to arrange, mount, and index them. To this New Mexico agreed but stipulated that the papers be returned. The Library of Congress refused to accede, and undertook to force the removal of the papers. By an Act of Congress of February 25, 1903, the Department of the Interior secured the transfer of these records to the Library of Congress, without stipulation on the part of New Mexico.

1 American Historical Association. Report. 1910.

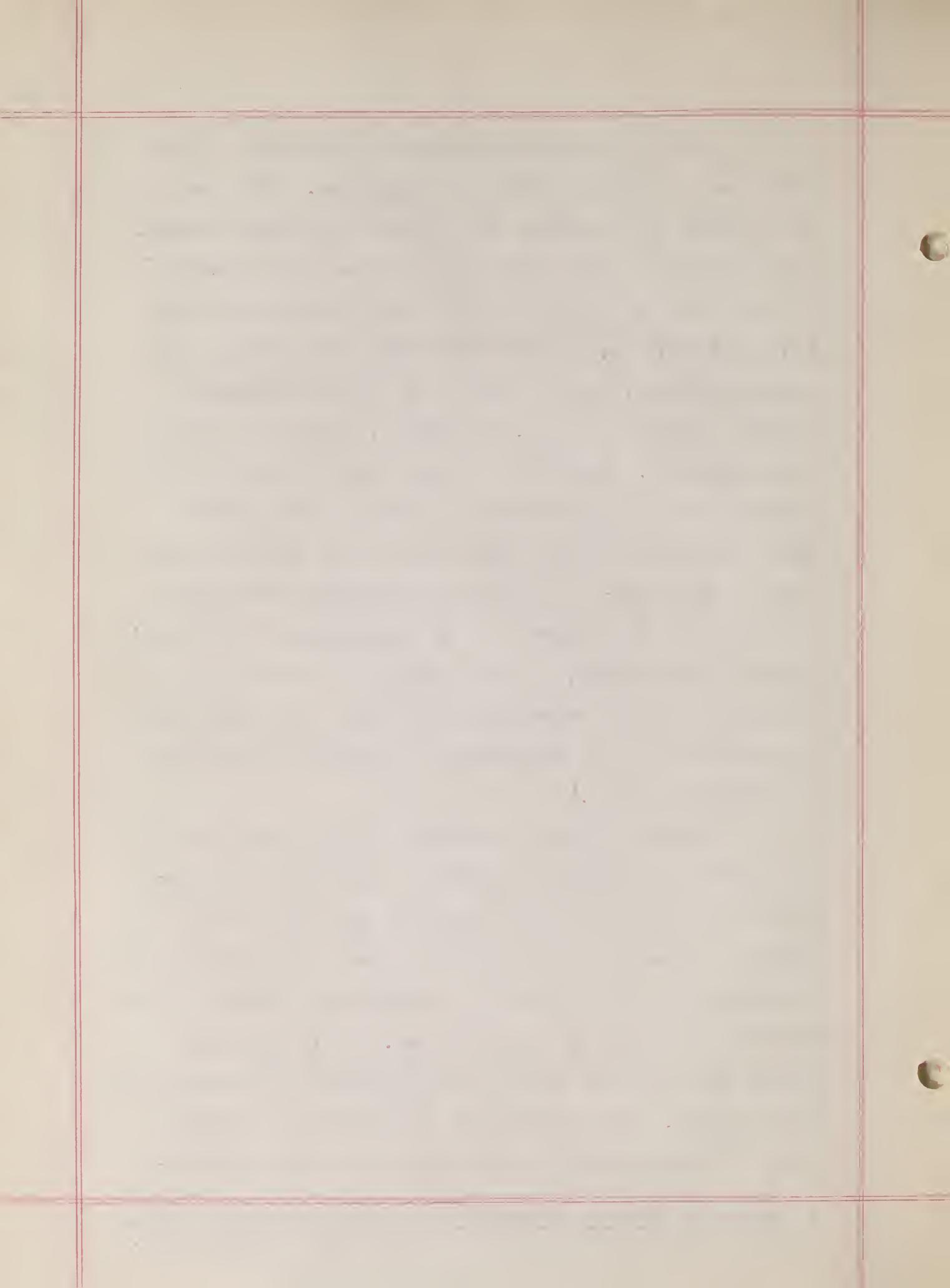
2 Ibid. 1909. Archives of New Mexico, by John H. Vaughan.



Problems concerning the physical care of documents make a separate study in themselves. This work is now thought of as outside the field of archival economy. The findings of the chemist are accepted and followed, and no archivist will risk experimentation without such scientific advice. It has been proved that water, as a softening agent, may be applied to certain documents without danger of injury. To others, only an oil can be safely applied. Whether to use an alkaline solution for restoration of inks, whether to use an arsenic paste, these questions are now given over to the chemist whose study of the make-up of paper and parchment guarantees the safety of the documents. An examination of Mitchell's book on this subject, or the reports of the Bureau of Standards on their experimentations will illustrate that the physical care of manuscripts is outside the province of archival economy.<sup>1</sup>

Storage likewise demands more or less of the scientific investigator. Whether or not dust can penetrate the various types of filing cases, whether air should or should not be allowed to reach the papers, and the effects of light on stored records are questions which must be given special consideration. It is generally agreed that archives should be filed flat, preferably in hinged boxes. Consideration of the problem of storage leads to the question of stack accomodation and in pro-

<sup>1</sup> Mitchell, Charles Ainsworth: Documents and their scientific care. Lond. 1922.



vision for such a large undertaking as the National Archives, to the architectural structure of the building, which is not within the scope of this paper.

The two subjects of classification and cataloging are deserving of separate treatment, being the fundamental studies in a program of archival economy.

### Classification

Library economy was far in advance of archival study when the members of the American Historical Association became interested. In the field of classification of books, there had been evolved several logical schemes such as the Dewey Decimal system, the Library of Congress method, and the Cutter.<sup>1</sup> Methods of cataloging and of filing had also been more or less standardized by the library profession. A nation-wide organization known as the American Library Association made for conformity of method throughout the country. It was assumed that library science could be modified so as to permit the handling of archives by the same fundamental principles.

Soon it was discovered that archival practice could not be based on the methods of library science. Library economy was devised to apply to books; the reasons for its failure to work equally well with archives were

1 Classification procedure. Report submitted by Dorsey W. Hyde, Jr. to R.D.W. Connor, Feb. 1935.



in the differences between books and archives. An archival serial, for instance, has a beginning when it is created by some governmental activity. But it does not end, though it may include many different subjects and be composed of a great many volume units. "An archival serial will lack the compositional integrity of (most) books."<sup>1</sup> Again, an archival serial is not an exposition of a subject: it is a chronological record of work. When authors write their books, even though they write of a contemporary period, these books are past history before they are off the press. But the authors of archives, government agencies, record their strictly contemporary processes. An archival serial may be contributed to in the work of hundreds of different persons who count as nothing with the archive, who are merely the channels through which the serial must run its course. Archival serials cannot, like books, be considered in a personal author relationship. In planning for a system of classification, it is well to remember that archives of the past are finished and complete. Except as occasional gaps might be filled in by chance recovery of lost papers, no provision need be made for intercalation of archives.

Author arrangement having proved impracticable, the schemes for a subject classification were considered. Of greatest interest to the members of the American Historical Association who attended the Brussels Conference were

1 Classification Procedure. Report No. 8. to R.D.W. Connor, Archivist, by Dorsey W. Hyde, Jr., Feb. 15, 1935.



the reports presented by representatives of those countries which had experimented with this system of classification. In France, in Belgium, in Sweden, and to some extent in England, the subject classification of archives had been applied and had miserably failed. In England the system had been called "methodizing" of records. In France, the subject classification had been instituted late in the eighteenth century by Daunou. It proved to be an awkward arrangement, and in 1841, the minister De Wailly issued a circular defining certain principles of arrangement for the purpose of returning the archives to their original order. It was not intended that this should be an established classification, but only that original order might be restored until some better plan of classification might be evolved. Unintentionally De Wailly had laid down the basic principle of archival arrangement in "le principe de la provenance avec respect des fonds." The Germans further developed the principles which De Wailly had first expressed. By them it was called "die Provenienz seiner Bestände", and by the Dutch, "Het Herkomstbeginsel". Drs. Muller, Peith, and Fruin had written an elucidation of the principles, which at the time of the Brussels Conference, had just been translated into French.

Representatives at Brussels were enthusiastic in their conviction of the improvement over the attempted subject arrangement. Our American representatives

<sup>1</sup> Virtue, Ethel B.: Principles of classification for archives.  
American Historical Association, Report.  
 1914. Vol. 1: 773-84.



were deeply impressed. Waldo Gifford Leland became the exponent of the principle in America, declaring it superior and simpler to apply than the more artificial systems such as the subject scheme, the author arrangement, alphabetical or numerical sequence, fixed or relative location, class arrangement, or size, all of which possibilities were studied with regard to archives.

It should be a cause for rejoicing that the United States may benefit by the experimentation which has been carried out in foreign archives. Thanks to the studies of the members of the Historical Association, the advantages of the principles of classification by "agency-of-origin" is a matter of common knowledge and acceptance. The experience in classification which England's archives endured will not be repeated here. Jenkinson says:

"To take only one instance, the State Papers are known to have had one classification in 1545 and to have been re-classified by Sir Thomas Wilson about 1620 and again by Sir Joseph Williamson about 1680; they were then 'methodized' between 1764 and 1800; and between 1848 and 1862 came under the State Paper Office classification; all this before they reached the Public Record Office, to undergo arrangement there."

Similar experiments in other foreign countries might be given as illustrative of the difficulties of arrangement which will most fortunately be spared the National Archives.

The separate departments of the government have devised schemes of classification within their own archival limits. This may complicate somewhat the establishment



of the uniform classification. The "respect des fonds" will be adhered to in all cases. The exposition of this principle has been many times attempted, but none has given it so clearly as Leland:

"records should be so grouped that they at once make clear the processes by which they have come into existence" because "archives are the product and record of the performance of its functions by an organic body, and they should faithfully reflect the working of that organism... the administrative entity must be the starting point and the unit, and the classifier must have a thorough knowledge of the history and functions of the office whose records he is arranging; he must know what relation the office has borne to other offices and the relation of each function to every other function."<sup>1</sup>

In adopting this principle, the United States will be acting in conformity to European nations and to England. It was at the Brussels Conference that the resolution had been proposed and adopted as the international plan of classification.

Practically, the development of a standard procedure remains to be formulated. Plans for the final archival classification have already been outlined tentatively.<sup>2</sup>

"First - According to department of origin;  
 Second - According to the sub-division of the department of origin;  
 Third - According to the number of the archival serial of such department or sub-division."<sup>3</sup>

The State Department might, for instance, be designated by "S".<sup>4</sup> The classification S6.12 would represent the 12th archival serial issued by the 6th sub-division or bureau of that Department. A location number might become

1 Sen. Doc. No. 717. 63d Cong. 3d Session. 1915. p.3.

2 Classification Procedure. p.6.



a part of the whole number because of the fact that fixed location will be possible in the arrangement of archives. Thus, B3.14, if added to the above, would give the added information that the specific archive was located on tier 14 of floor 3 of Stack Section B. The complete number would read S6.12B3.14.

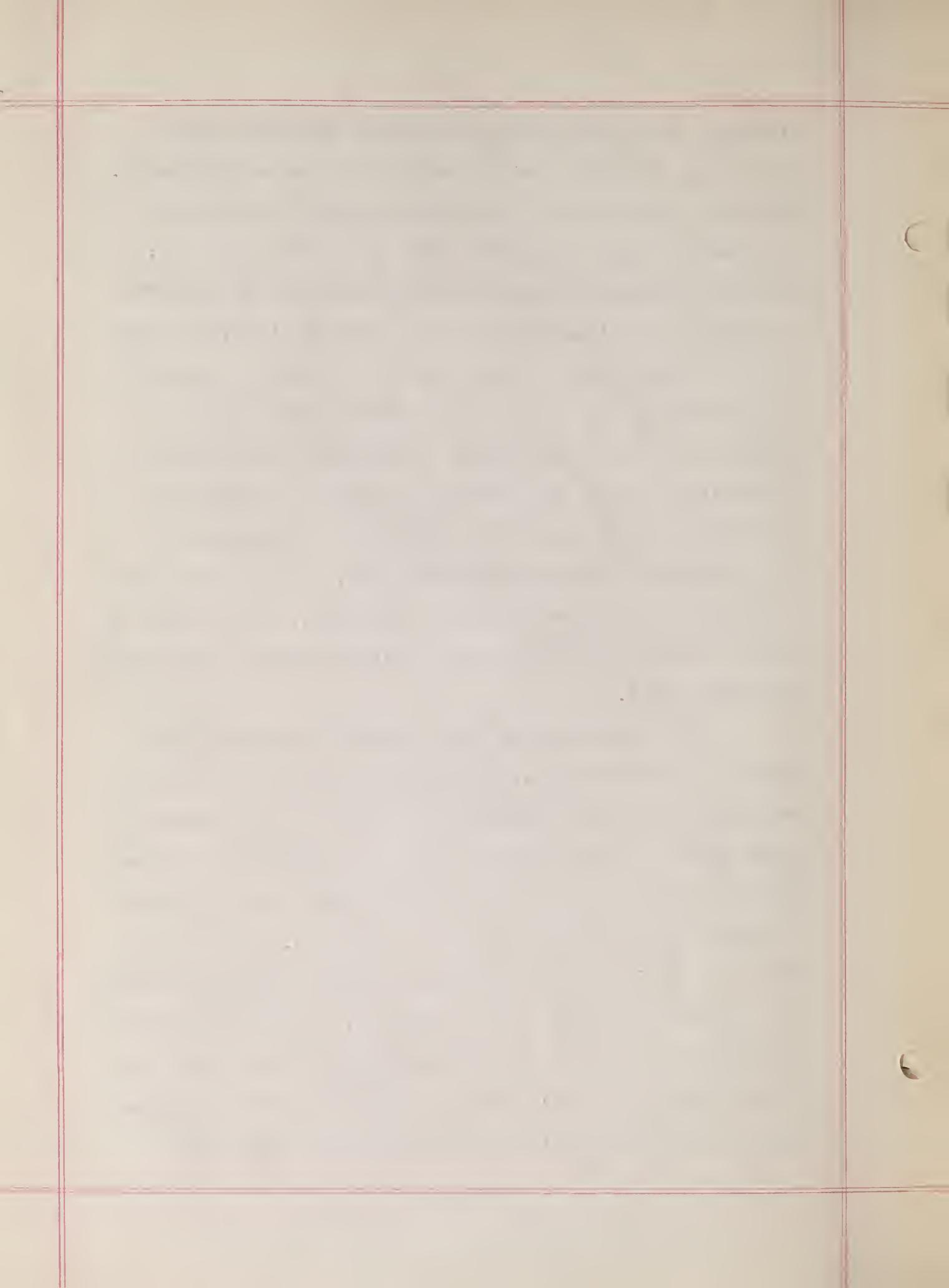
This relatively simple procedure will be accompanied by more complicated problems when cases will arise "in which there are no 'fonds' to respect."<sup>1</sup> Such will be the independent establishments like the National Recovery Act, the International Joint Commission, and so on. In the legislative branch there will be special procedure necessary to provide for regional federal court jurisdiction. The problem of Personnel archives is being considered in the matter of classification, the problem being to determine whether Personnel archives shall remain with the department of origin in all cases, or whether they should be centralized. Strong arguments for diverging from strict application of the principle are advanced because of their historical and sociological value.

The program of activity for organizing the work of classification includes many steps which would have to be carried out only in the initiation of the system. Before a start could be made, it would be necessary to chart the chronological duration of all legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the government, and their sub-di-



visions. The second step would be to similarly chart all of the archival serials emanating from such branches. This once completed, it would be necessary to analyze the archival serials as regards form, character, and size; to study the existing methods of classification of separate departments to discover bases of classification; to study physical forms such as petitions and letters to determine whether such should affect the classification plan; to investigate the possibility of a standard definition of an archival series; and finally, to devise an official alphabetic-numeric numbering system for the practical application of the classification plan. This is briefly the plan of procedure which was submitted, tentatively, by Dorsey W. Hyde to the National Archivist Robert D.W. Connor, early this year.

The importance of such a classification scheme cannot be overestimated. Its advantages over other plans are many, the obvious value being that it is the natural arrangement. It will be the endeavor of those who undertake this work to make it an actual working plan without disrupting the systems already in existence. Hence there will be no period of reorganization during which historians will be denied the use of the archives. In the program of procedure, the study of the organization of government is of utmost importance in making a beginning with full knowledge of the difficulties to be surmounted. For, as



Muller, Feith and Fruin said long ago:

"Not the first best systematizer, or even the first best historian, is equipped to classify it, but only he who has studied the organization of the archives." From *Anleitung zum Ordnen und Beschreiben von Archiven*.

### Cataloging

In cataloging procedure, we have not been so fortunate as to have European patterns for guidance. Past experience in cataloging as it has been carried on in the separate departments of the government and in special libraries where archival collections are located, must furnish the basis for formulating a program. If one may be allowed a comparison, it might be said that in treating of books, the cataloging was of more importance than the classification, but that the opposite will be true in treating of archives. It is because the classification of archives is more natural than the classification of books, and by it, rather than through the catalog, it will be possible to locate the material of interest. The cataloging will be of secondary importance to the archive.

Within the departments, card catalogs, or indexes as they might be more exactly described, already exist to some extent. There are also finding lists, or inventories.



The tendency at present is to emphasize the card catalogs rather than the inventories. This may be because the service of the archives has been mainly to the departments and not to the more general demands of the historians. The latter means of finding material appeals more to the students of history. In other words, the card catalog is more satisfactory than the inventory in answering requests for information such as "the verification of dates and of sources referring to particular events, and the verification of particular statistical sources and data."<sup>1</sup> The inventory, on the other hand, is better adapted for furnishing the demands of historians which deal with particular periods and movements, and which involve a greater degree of intensive research.

Both types of information will be in demand by those workers who will frequent the archives, and by understanding their needs the best procedure for the catalog can be carried out. The first type of need is that called factual information which will be sought most often by government officials in the service of their departments. This is the primary field of the National Archives Establishment. The second type of need is that which permits the development of inventories and of calendars which will be of particular aid in facilitating the research of historians, especially in their search for source material.

The several indexes which exist vary greatly in

1 Cataloguing Procedure. Report No. 7, to R.D.W. Connor, Archivist, by Dorsey W. Hyde, Jr. Feb. 12, 1935.



the degree of fullness of information which they give. They display further such lack of uniformity as to make it impossible to attempt to make of them a comprehensive file. For these reasons and also because of a conviction of the possibilities of service which might be attained through a good catalog, a tentative plan of procedure for this undertaking has been outlined, the work in this case also having been done by Dorsey W. Hyde, Jr.

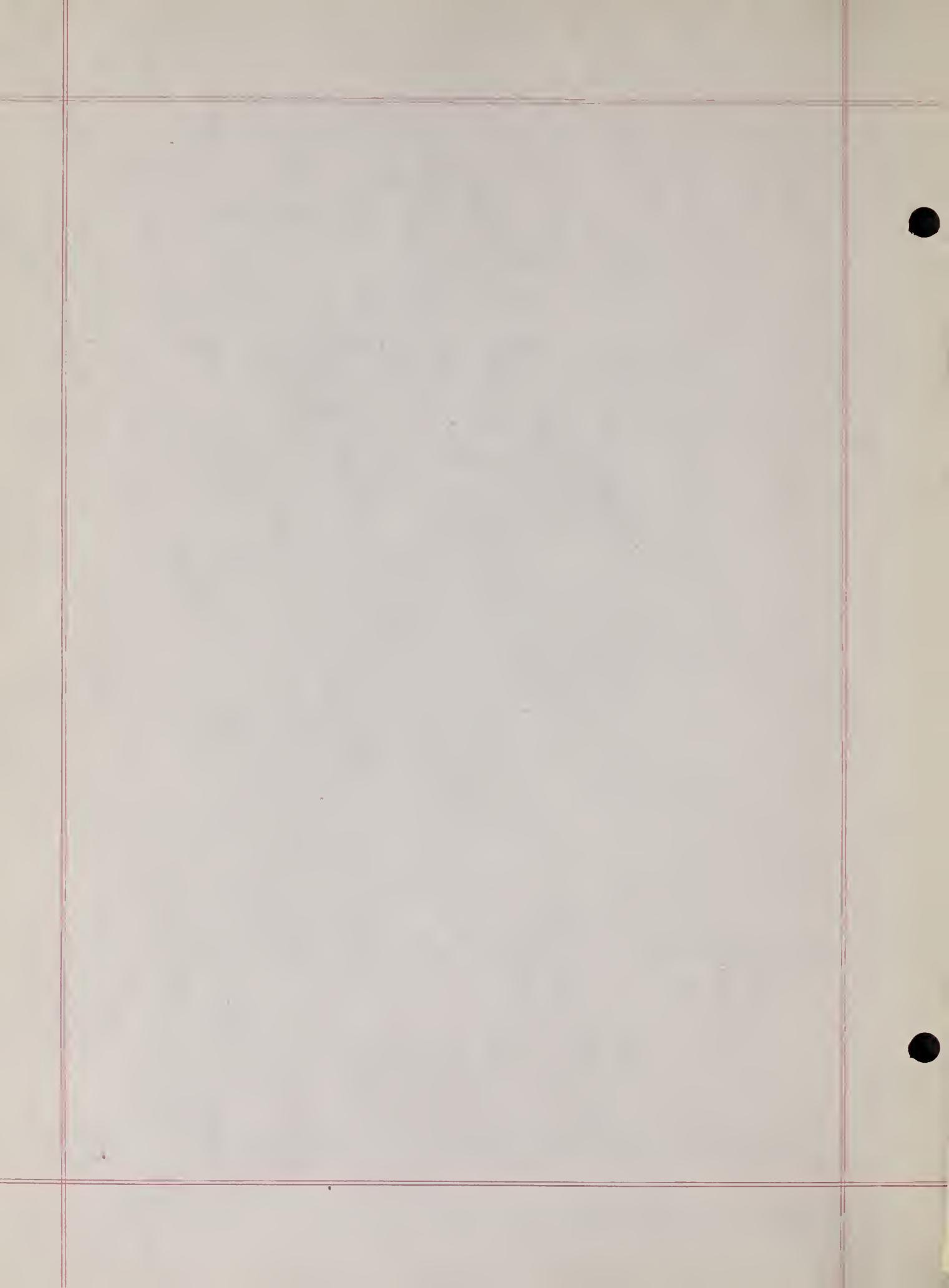
Factual cataloging will involve:

- "a. The identifying, by title, of particular archival serials.
- b. The identifying of proper and personal place names in particular archival serials.
- c. The identifying of outstanding events and movements, etc., in particular archival serials through subject cataloging."<sup>1</sup>

The importance of subject cataloging is admitted by everyone, but no subject list can be found which will apply to archives. The labor of making one from the beginning, therefore, will have to be undertaken as part of the work. Once made, the value of such a list will be appreciated in all collections of which archives form a part.

At the time that factual cataloging is being carried on, the inventory work can be continued by making an analysis of each archival serial as soon as it is received. This will ensure a continuous inventory of material available for immediate use. "This inventory will, in fact, be a detailed calendar of all the archival serials in each section. It will be used as a basis for all future cataloging work."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cataloguing Procedure. p.6.



The future cataloging, it is hoped, will supply a proportionately equal and even distribution of cataloging among all departments. Certain collections may be treated with more fullness of detail which will be necessary because of the greater demand for them; but the lack of indexes which exists in some of the bureaus is to be remedied.

Through the catalog it will be possible to break down archival serials into sub-serials or divisions of serials in the same manner that analytic entries provide for similar break downs in book cataloging. The similarity of cataloging books and archives is not always evident, but that there are occasions when the theory of book cataloging is fundamental also for archives should not be disregarded.

The thoroughness with which the cataloging process will be carried out cannot be determined at this date. One fact in this connection which has been definitely decided is that exhaustive cataloging of archives is impracticable and indeed impossible. Even though such cataloging made no attempt to cover the accumulated archives and strove only to care for those which were incoming, the number of individual documents would preclude the undertaking.

In order that some guide may be had for determining the fullness of cataloging entries, it has been proposed that the procedure be delayed for a period of six months during which time it would be the duty of the Reference



Division to keep a record of all service demands which were made of his department. By this means it is hoped that an analysis of needs may determine the point to which cataloguing will be carried out.

From this, it may be seen that there is an uncertainty in the outline of procedure in this field. It may be necessary to make several attempts at formulating a plan which will be at once practicable and serviceable.

The fact that the National Archives has made parallel recognition of the two fields of service apparent, and has announced its intention of supplying both fields in the catalog procedure as in every other function should be evidence of their earnest desire to consider the historian.

The historical document lends itself better to the somewhat inflexible system of book cataloguing. Yet here too there must be applications of the fundamental principles rather than the actual rules. The Library of Congress has instituted a system of cataloguing for its historical documents which is satisfactory for the type of documents which they have.<sup>1</sup> The Huntington Library in California also has in practice a system which supplies full entries for historical documents.<sup>2</sup> No attempt whatever, on the other hand, has been made to catalog such papers as are in the possession of the New York Public Library, Mr. Paltsits depending rather on the classification system which is in use. All libraries and especially those who possess collections of historical

1 Fitzpatrick, J.C.: Notes on the care, cataloguing...of manuscripts. (Library of Congress)

2 Huntington Library. Brief note on the...classification, and cataloguing.



interest will watch the progress of cataloging at the National Archives with a critical eye. It is an important work and a difficult one.

"To prepare a catalogue (in the exact and at the same time summary form which is now used) is a laborious task, a task without joy and without reward...but many minds are attracted by tasks which, like this, are at once determinate, capable of being definitely completed and of manifest utility. In the large and heterogeneous family of those who labor to promote the progress of historical study, the makers of descriptive catalogues form a section to themselves."<sup>1</sup>

1 Langlois and Seignobos: Introduction to the study of history. p. 36.



## THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES BUILDING

Not for more than a decade after the World War was there any legislation for an archives building. Yet the number of archives which had come into existence in the interim had greatly increased, representing the normal rate of increase plus the increase caused by the war. Studies in space requirements give some idea of the bulk of records which would have to be provided for. Up to January, ~~of~~ 1917, including those archives from the very start of our history as the United States, the bulk of records was approximately 1,000,000 cubic feet.<sup>1</sup> But the figures from 1917 to 1930 showed that the files had almost doubled in those few years the total accumulation of our history. If an archives building were to be constructed on such a large scale as would be necessary to accomodate such a mass of material, the project needed the serious attention of authorities in the field. The time had come for Congress to give way to those who had made thorough studies of the situation and who had the ability, though not the authority, to achieve an archives building.

Senator Smoot, in 1924, introduced the subject in Congress.<sup>2</sup> Once again the building was to be a part of a

1 Speech of Clifton A. Woodrum. p. 11.

2 Ibid. p.5.



general building program. Two years later the Public Buildings Act of 1926 was passed, on May 25. In speaking of it, the Hon. Richard N. Elliott, Chairman of the House Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, said:

"The passage of this act marked an epoch in the history of the public buildings of our country, for the reason that it was the beginning of the first comprehensive building program adopted by our Government."<sup>1</sup>

Many of the buildings provided for in this Act would be erected in the Triangle of seventy-four acres. The question of location of the Archives had not at this time been determined. For the furtherance of this federal enterprise, Congress immediately appropriated \$165,000,000, the construction of buildings to extend over a period of five years.<sup>2</sup>

Construction of the Archives Building was considered at a conference of the Treasury Department, presided over by Charles Dewey.<sup>3</sup> The site then chosen was one behind the Post-Office building. The actual construction of the building was to be planned by architects and by experts in the library field. The American Historical Association had been long insistent that representatives of the profession be given a voice in the plans and design of the building. The presence among the architects of such experts in the library field ensured a satisfactory structure from the professional standpoint. The probable cost of such a building as that which was planned, was

1 Speech of Clifton A. Woodrum. p.5.

2 Christian Science Monitor. Files. Sept. 25, 1926.



estimated at over ten million dollars, this to include the equipment and finishing.

The first difficulty in the way of immediate procedure lay in the protracted discussions, amounting to a petty quarrel, over the location of the building. Dr. Jameson, representing the American Historical Association, could report no optimistic message touching this delay. To him and to many others it seemed that the Archives building might be fated to remain only a vision for another hundred and twenty years, while Congress and the committees sought to come to agreement. Meantime, Congress had appropriated an additional amount to the sum provided for in the Act of 1926, so that the amount by this appropriation was \$8,750,000.

The location of the building was eventually and definitely agreed upon, to be at the small end of the Triangle of government buildings, a location just half way between the White House and the Capitol, and between Pennsylvania and Constitution Avenues. The Triangle itself covered seventy-four acres, and was to be occupied wholly by federal offices.

During the delay caused by condemnation proceedings, the plans were made for construction of the building, and they were accepted.<sup>1</sup> In October of 1928, Louis A. Simon, Superintendent of the Architectural Division, expressed the uncertainty and the hesitancy which was felt in the

<sup>1</sup> Cong. Record. Vol. 78, p.12184.



undertaking. There was, he said, an absence of a defined policy of procedure in the handling of the records; and an absence of precedent for centralized control. He felt that plans for a building could not proceed without some supervision from one who had authority to administrate the archives. The questions which the architects raised as to the number of cubic feet of documents to be provided for met with varying and approximate replies. It was conceded that a proportion of the documents would come under the "useless" papers classification, but there was no one who could declare them so and arrange for their destruction. In his opinion much of the material was but the record of commercial and petty transactions, not worthy of a place in such a building as was proposed. In spite of the difficulties in preparing the plans, the actual building process was started and the ground was broken in September of 1931.

If at this time the American Historical Association had been prepared to step forward and submit a definite plan of procedure, the National Archives Act might not have been delayed until 1934. The appointment of the Archivist should have come even before the laying of the cornerstone. Those who could see the unwisdom of possessing a huge archives building and no provision made for its administration were few in number, and they were the theorizers. Nevertheless, the construction was under way, preparing architecturally the best possible depository, for safety of



the documents, for convenience in administration, and for beauty of design. Hastening lest the work be delayed again, President Hoover laid the cornerstone on February 19, 1932.

Modelled after the temples of ancient Greece, the National Archives building is said to equal the Supreme Court building in beauty. It is a windowless structure, with a pillared front, giving an impression of endurance, simplicity and dignity, the work of John Russell Pope. At the entrance are two huge doors of bronze, thirty-five feet high, nine feet wide, and one foot thick, doors so delicately balanced that the pressure of a little finger will swing either one wide open.<sup>1</sup>

Within the building, is evidence of the contribution which science has given but recently to the preservation of documents. Toward this end, there is provision for the regulation of temperature and of humidity. A refrigerating system gives the effect of a thousand tons of ice melting each day. In order to protect the paper from a deteriorating acid which is carried in the air, all the air which enters this building is washed by an alkaline solution which cleanses it of the acid. In provisions such as these, the new National Archives building has no equal on the Continent.<sup>1</sup>

The building will provide for the archival needs

1 Christian Science Monitor. Files. July 5, 1934.



of this country for a great many years. It is not anticipated that another will ever be necessary. The capacity of this building is 10,000,000 cubic feet of documents. The annual accumulation is approximately 200,000 cubic feet, three cubic feet of storage being allowed for each cubic foot of material. The number of cubic feet of documents to be transferred at the present time has not been estimated, but it is thought that about sixty per cent of the space in the building will be utilized for storage.<sup>1</sup>

The future of documents and their storage hold many possibilities which may revolutionize our present conception of them. The possibility of filming many of our archives and preserving only the film is one of these. In the Archives building there are eight large vaults where such films are to be stored and where further experimentation will take place. Sometime in the future, instead of poring over the leaves of a large and awkward volume of manuscript, it may be the procedure to sit in a darkened room and watch these sheets appear on a screen before us, to be exhibited rapidly or slowly or to repeat, as we might wish. The problem of storage then might be, not the millions of cubic feet of documents which might be accommodated but the number of little tins, hermetically sealed, that might be placed on a shelf.

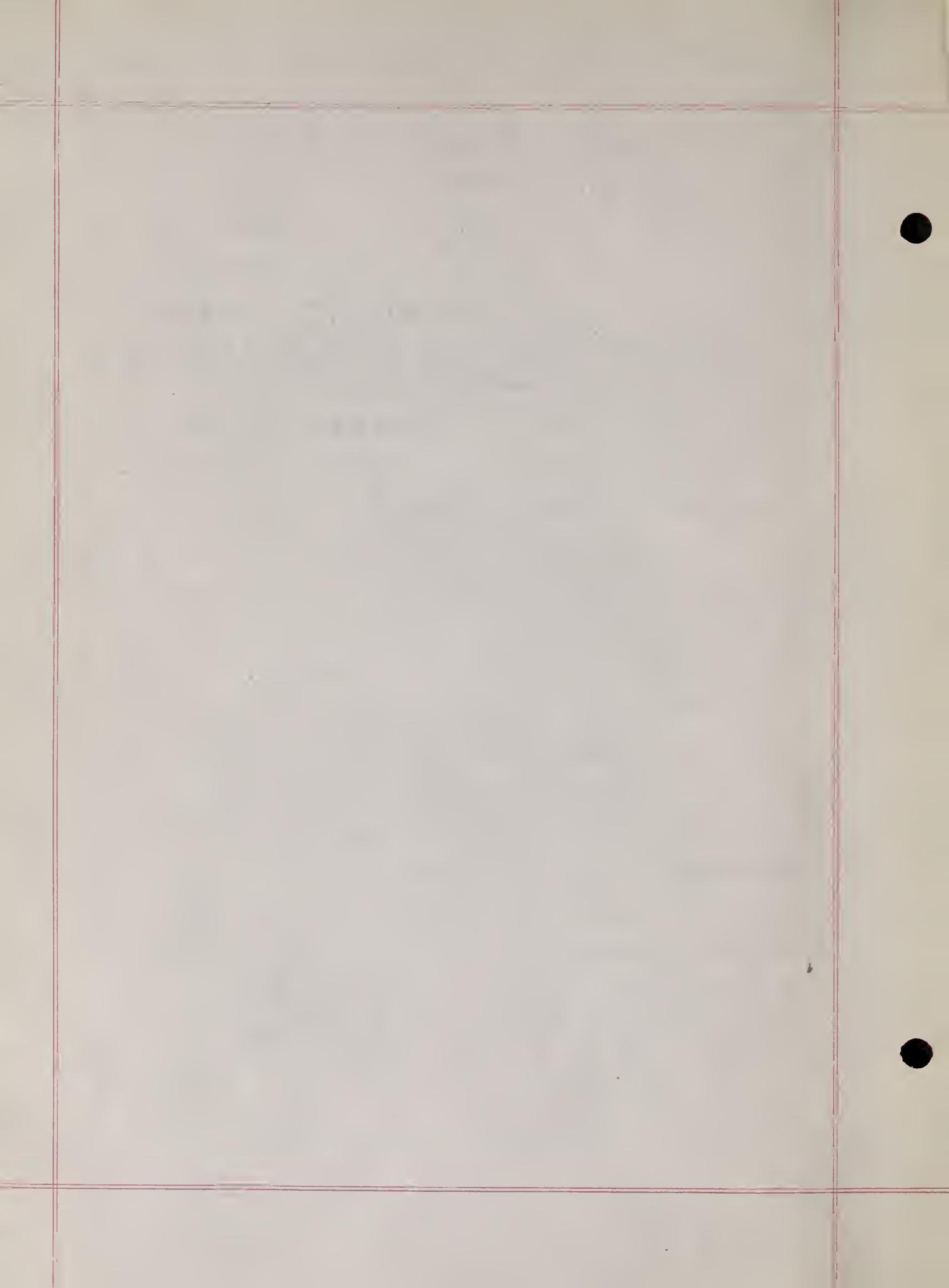
<sup>1</sup> Report. Advisory Committee on National Archives Building.  
Nov. 11, 1930.



The procedure of the National Archives does not admit, at present, of developing the filming of documents as a substitute for storage. The main purpose of them is to make records, on films, of events which are of importance, especially to history. Certain collections of these films, illustrative of history, are to be donated by the moving picture companies which produced them.

Another interesting venture which is within the province of the National Archives procedure is that concerning sound recordings. Speeches of the presidents and of our famous men and women may be preserved here as if the record were of the written word. A new aluminum disc has been perfected for such sound recordings which will, it is said, endure for a thousand years.

Such is the National Archives Building today, practically completed within and without. It is far different from "the cheap building" proposed for a hall of records by Quartermaster General Meigs nearly sixty years ago. And different also from that which was to be provided with many large windows opening outward in order to allow for lowering the documents to safety in case of fire. Yet it may be some cause for speculation among us that as we have changed in the past one hundred and twenty years so may we change again.



## THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES ACT

The passage of the Act establishing the National Archives went through Congress and was approved by the President without any of the delay which accompanied the legislative efforts to obtain a building. This was the more surprising because some of its provisions were such as might be expected to arouse a storm of protest. That they did not is additional evidence that the work of the American Historical Association, particularly that of Dr. J. Franklin Jameson, had been successful in building up a realization of the need for an Act which would guarantee full powers of archival control to a single individual.

The bill was introduced in the House by Mr. Bloom, in April, 1934.<sup>1</sup> By June 19, it had completed the rounds of committees, had been discussed, amended, accepted by Congress, and approved by the President. It is true that an Act of some sort was a necessity in order to put the Archives Building into service; but that action could be taken so unhesitatingly is due to a great degree to the excellence of the bill itself. The provisions of the bill were clearly and forcefully stated, and omitted nothing

1. Congressional Record. Indexes, 1934-35.



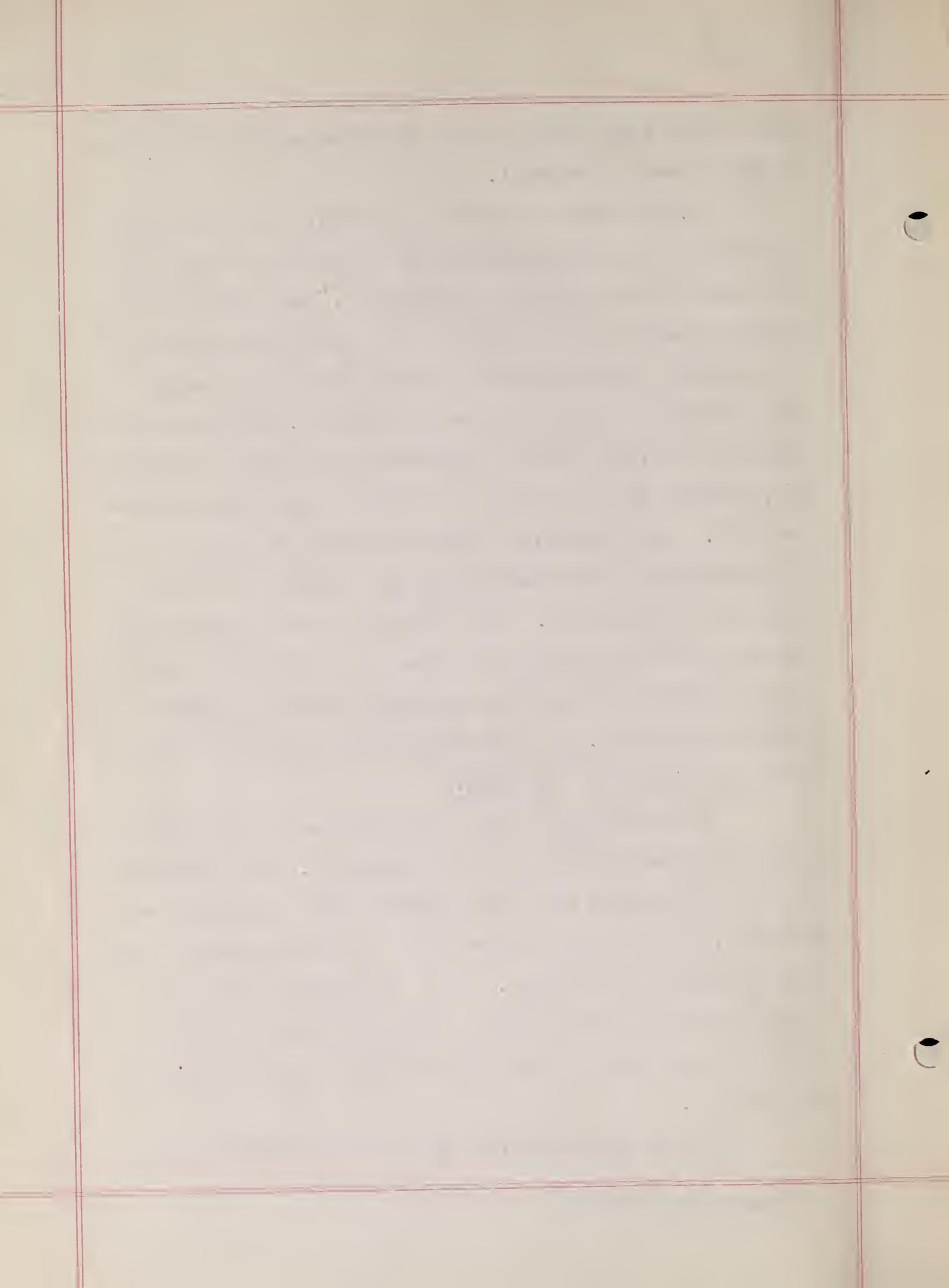
which could have added to the concentration of the records of the federal government.

Discussions in Congress concerning the bill had centered on two of its provisions, the one of salary, and the other of appointments of employees.<sup>1</sup> Objection to the amount of salary which the Archivist should receive was based mainly on the fact that he would receive a salary equal to that of the Librarian of Congress. It was stated that, with 70,000 federal employees in the City of Washington, someone should be found who would accept the position for less. The Archivist could be thought of only as a superintendent of documents might be, and not to be compared to the Librarian. This objection was not sustained, nor was that which raised the issue of appointments which would be made by the Archivist rather than by the Civil Service Commission. No objections were voiced as to the actual provisions of the bill.

Recommendations for slight changes in phraseology and in punctuation were made and agreed to. The amendment was for the storage of motion picture films and sound recordings, which could not have been permitted without some such provision in the bill. As it was finally read, the bill showed very few changes, except for the addition of the one amendment. It was placed on the Consent Calendar on April 16.

The National Archives Act provides first for the

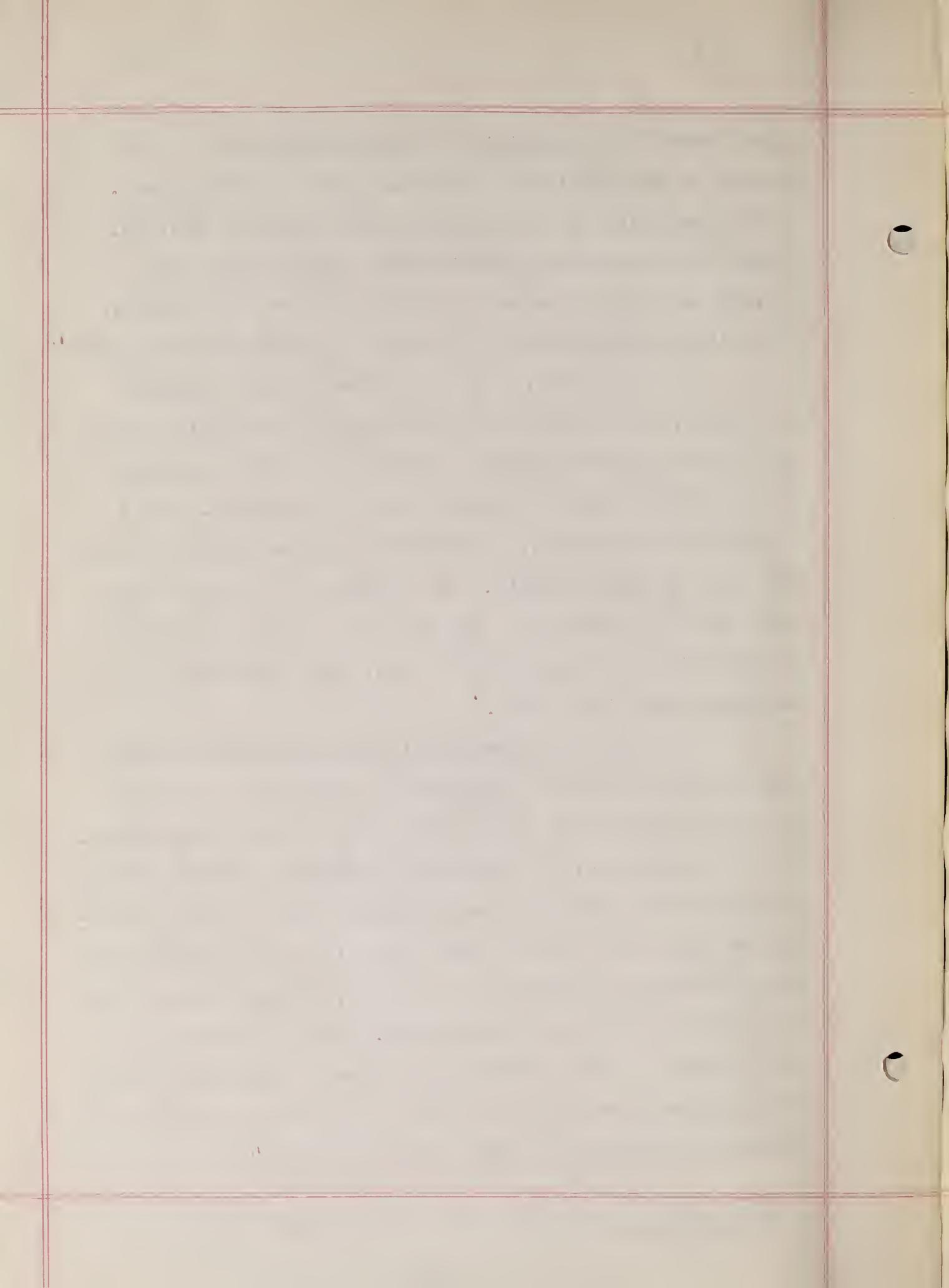
1 Congressional Record, Vol. 78.



appointment of an Archivist of the United States, to be chosen by the President, with the consent of the Senate. The salary which he shall receive was placed at \$10,000. Other appointments of officials who receive more than \$5,000 are also to be made by the President, and Senate, but other employees are to be chosen by the Archivist alone.<sup>1</sup>

All archives, legislative, executive, judicial, and other, are to be in the custody of the Archivist, who shall have power to inspect any records of the Government and to requisition for transfer any such records, except confidential archives, as may meet with the approval of the National Archives Council. In the power of the Archivist also rests the custody of the Archives Building, with the responsibility for arrangement, use, and withdrawal of materials deposited there.<sup>1</sup>

An important provision is that which establishes the National Historical Publications Commission, which is to publish historical collections among the archival papers. Of this Commission, the Archivist is chairman, other members being one from the Department of State, one from the Department of War, and from the Navy, the Chief of the Division of Manuscripts of the Library of Congress, and two members from the American Historical Association. In the provision for establishment of this Commission is the statement that such publications as may be undertaken shall have precedence over detailed calendars and textual reproductions.<sup>1</sup>



Another provision is that which allows for the appointment of the National Archives Council. The work of the Council is to define the materials which are to be transferred from the departments to the Archives Building. Membership of the Council is to be made up of the Secretaries of each of the executive departments, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Library, and the chairman of the House Committee on Library, the Librarian of Congress, the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and the Archivist.

There is a provision for the Archivist to make recommendations to Congress for the disposal of useless papers and documents among the archives. He also is to direct the expenditure of all appropriations for the maintenance of the Archives Building and the administration of the collections. Regular appropriations, under his direction, are authorized for the continuance of the National Archives.

These are the main provisions of the Act establishing the National Archives. Its passage definitely settled some of the problems that had been so long considered by members of the American Historical Association, and settled also many controversial points among an interested public, which feared to see the Library of Congress lose any of its prestige.

It has been criticised as being too elaborate an Act, in the sense of being impractical. The "archives



"set-up" it was called by a member of Congress recently.<sup>1</sup> Yet, when discussions of details regarding the bill came before Congress, there was displayed an entire unconcern or ignorance as to the significance of the movement. Objections were overridden because they were not the product of serious thought, and the provisions of the bill were the result of years of study and of discussion within the American Historical Association.

The provision for an Archivist was of immediate concern. His appointment came early in October, President Roosevelt naming Robert Digges Wimberly Connor, of North Carolina.<sup>2</sup> He had been recommended for the position by the executive committee of the American Historical Association. His archival experience, his interest in history, and his general cultural background betoken a degree of success in the administration of the new venture. Dr. Connor had been for eighteen years the archivist of his own state, North Carolina, before he accepted his position as a member of the faculty, teaching history and government at the University of North Carolina, which position he has held for the past twelve years. As a member of the American Historical Association and of the group who devoted special thought to archival economy, his name has appeared in the Annual Reports of that body for many years. He is a member of the North Carolina Historical Commission, and the North Carolina Historical Association, as well as of the National

1 Mr. Michener. House of Representatives. Hearing on  
The National Archives, by Clifton A. Woodrum.  
May, 1933.

2 Christian Science Monitor. Oct. 10, 1934.



Board for Historical Service. He has written a history of his own state, from 1635-1783. Dr. Connor's special interest has been the collection of a library of source material of history for North Carolina, a collection which has been added to and carried on by the Daughters of the Confederacy. He is fifty-six years old, and of his immediate family, his father was Judge Henry Groves Connor, one of his brothers is a judge, and another brother is a justice of the State Supreme Court.<sup>1</sup>

As yet it is too soon to pass judgment on the actual accomplishments of the Archives Establishment under Dr. Connor. He has made no statement of the policies which he will follow. He has, however, made a clear statement of the aims of the establishment, the concentration in a central depository of all the inactive archives of the Government, and the administration of such archives so as to facilitate their use in the business of Government and in the service of scholarship. In his appointments he has given evidence that they will be made carefully and with great consideration of the preparation and experience of those who will carry on the work.

Not only has the appointment of the Archivist given direction and force to the undertaking: it has made it possible for the studies of the American Historical Association to be put into practice, and there has been no other body in the United States and no training school



which prepared students in archival economy. It seems only just that one of the group which had prepared for such a work should have been chosen as Archivist.

There were now answered the questions of control which had long been of uncertainty. The next matter of importance to a great many people was the fate of the original Declaration of Independence, and of the Constitution of the United States. Would they be moved from the Library of Congress to the new Archives Building? President Hoover's words, in laying the cornerstone for the building, had led people to believe that they would be transferred. The Declaration of Independence had been moved many times, from the Patent Office, then a part of the Department of State, to the Department of the Interior, and back to the Department of State in 1849. It had even made the trip to Philadelphia for exhibition purposes, from which place it was returned to be stored in the Library of the Department of State, which lacked space for its display.<sup>1</sup> For this reason the Declaration was finally removed to the Library of Congress where it can be satisfactorily exhibited, along with the Constitution, to all who wish to see it. The recent decision in this matter has left the future of these two historical documents in the custody of the Congressional Library. The National Archives Building will not draw the number of casual visitors which the Library of Congress will, nor is it intended to be a museum.

1 Allen, Andrew Hussey. In Amer. Hist. Ass. Report. 1894.



The Archives establishment may serve as an excellent example of the slowness of obtaining action from the government of the United States. At the same time, it is not to be denied that any previous action would have been inauspicious to the future of our archives. Had an Archives building been obtained in the period before the World War, it would not have been made sufficiently large to accomodate the increase of documents which that War caused. Again, had the building been secured immediately after the War, there would not have been the means of providing protection for the documents by the latest scientific methods. Nor at any time until most recently would it have been possible to foresee the part which photographic reproduction by the moving picture film may take in the future of documents. The delay also has allowed the efforts of the American Historical Association to develop an appreciation of archives which we in this country sadly lacked. For these reasons the long delay in the attainment of the ideal may be thought of as giving the best assurance to the future welfare of the archives of the federal government.



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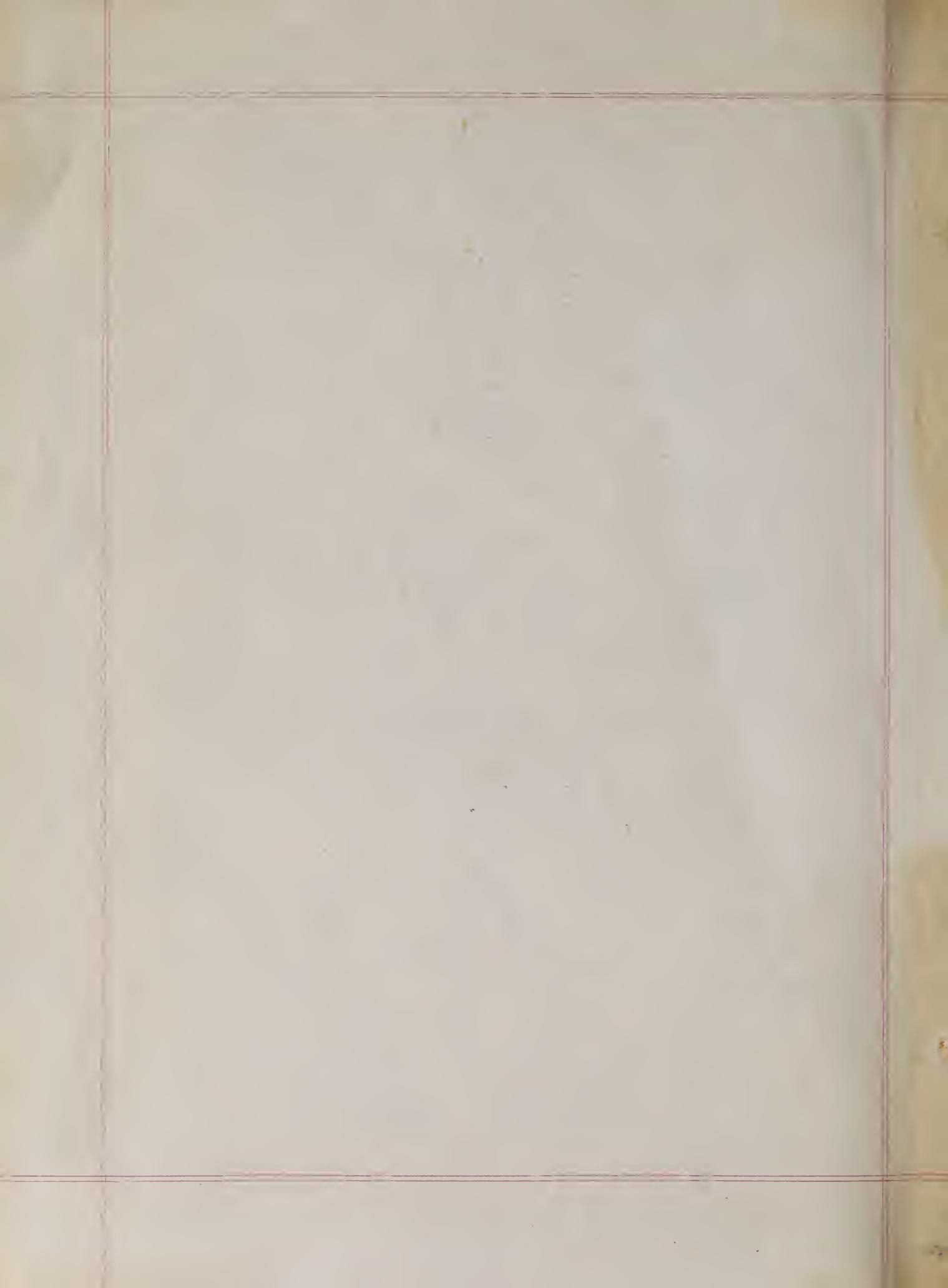
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